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Genna Sosonko

The Reliable Past



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Foreword by Garry Kasparov

Genna Sosonko

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Ode to a Free Man

by Garry Kasparov

It is no secret that many well-known chess players, after leaving for the West in Soviet times, were able to achieve far more there than they had in their mother country (the most striking example being Kortchnoi). But they normally left when they were already grandmasters, whereas Genna Sosonko, who was virtually the first to leave the USSR, in 1972, was 'only' a simple Leningrad master. After settling in Holland, he promptly engaged in what he liked best: he began working for the magazine *Schaakbulletin* (the predecessor of *New In Chess Magazine*) and he threw himself wholeheartedly into tournament life.

The sharp progress that he made in chess at the age of thirty makes a big impression. Sosonko developed into a grandmaster of world class, a strong competitor and well-known theoretician, a creative player who sought new paths and had his own ideas.

In these years he also revealed his talent in the field of chess journalism, especially of a literary variety. This genre had attracted him long before. Genna, a man of broad humanitarian erudition and a sharp, critical mind, is greatly interested in the world of chess, its people and its past (which is a rarity in modern times). When we met in the late 1980s we often talked about these topics, and discussed the burning problems of chess life. In the 1990s many of the thoughts that featured in our conversations were expressed in his splendid scholarly articles. They in turn were transformed into the book *Russian Silhouettes* (2001), which I read and re-read with enormous pleasure. And now you have before you a new collection of incomparable literary chess essays by Genna Sosonko – *The Reliable Past*.

The reader is presented with a gallery of wonderful pen-portraits, written with a love and devotion for chess, and with a due measure of objectivity and detachment. Look – this is the chess world, its heroes with all their virtues and defects! The most varied people

find their way into this distinctive pantheon – those who have set up the basis and the point of chess' existence. The author keenly senses the underlying psychology and the hidden sources of events. And in every line, one is aware of his desire to make our chess world slightly better, cleaner and brighter.

I have to admit that his selfless creativity helped me in my work on the book *My Great Predecessors*. I wanted to show the process of chess development precisely through the fate of its past heroes, and to impart to the reader not only the moves and variations, but also the very atmosphere of those times.

But how was it that Genna achieved such a level of inner freedom? Here is his own admission: 'My present became what it is largely thanks to the past, which I wanted to reject. [...] In order to perceive Russia, I had to move away from it and see it from a distance.' Yes, he was fortunate to leave at an age when Soviet complexes had not yet managed to take hold of him entirely. After all, even today the chess elite is primarily Soviet in its mentality; even many of those who departed in the 1980s and '90s have left their heart in Soviet chess. And this is to say nothing of journalists. Reading many present-day articles, one constantly senses intrigues and 'trimming of the sails' to suit the readership. With Genna there is no trace of it! He has managed to become a genuinely free person and to rise above the conventionalities of the chess world. It is very important that he has an excellent knowledge of this world and is himself an indelible part of it, but it is his position of an independent observer, keenly noticing both the good and the bad, that makes his stories so rich and fascinating. His portraits are not journalism, but literature. Whether you like it or not, that's how it was! And he is not very concerned what will be said about this by any prominent chess figures.

Genna Sosonko can safely be considered a worthy successor to the best traditions of chess literature of the first half of the twentieth century, which was developed, in particular, in the pre-war Russian emigration (Znosko-Borovsky, Tartakower) and almost completely eliminated in the Soviet Union, since from the start of Soviet domination in chess the game was politicised and the slightest opportu-

nity was lost to tell the whole truth about people, or to give a rounded and objective description of them. It is to Genna's credit that he has been able to revive this genre and to create a style of narrative that gives genuine pleasure to even the most demanding reader.

I hope that the author of this book will continue for as long as possible doing that which he does better than anyone in the world. Since every new story of his preserves a few more grains of our chess existence. To me this seems very important, and I hope that Genna will be able to preserve for future generations many more characters and destinies. However chess has changed, their history will always be interesting to people as a part of human culture.

Moscow, July 2003

Preface

In the preface of a book the reader and the writer are looking in opposite directions. For a reader the book is situated in the future. For the writer it's in the past. And the past is what this book is about. It's about the history of chess and about people from the chess world.

Having travelled the path of centuries, chess has completely changed its initial image of a nice way to pass the time for some bored Rajah. The motto of the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen – 'Not just for entertainment' – can be applied to modern chess. While for millions of chess fans it remains just a game, on the higher levels it became a sport and a science, and what is left artful is actually just one thing: the artful way to use the achievements of modern technology.

In many areas of life – music, literature, politics – when a person becomes famous he can rest on his laurels: his reputation will work for him. Chess is another story: you are only judged by your present achievements, not the old ones. There are no phony heroes in chess; it's impossible to discover a star today who lived at the same time with Capablanca but had passed unnoticed by his contemporaries, and it is impossible to discredit an outstanding player – because a player's reputation is only proved by the quality of his games and by his results. Chess requires continuous effort, a player must keep proving his class and reputation. That's why top-level chess has always been a difficult if not excruciating job.

Already in the 1930s Huizinga wrote that although chess is an increasingly serious and therefore cruel game, it still remains a game. Nowadays, it has become a sport more than ever. The more static a sport is, the more developed are the ways to analyse all the different situations and positions, and chess is the most characteristic example of such a sport. The informational explosion that we are all very familiar with, has very much affected chess too in the last decade.

Hundreds of games that are played in numerous tournaments become public knowledge within a couple of hours from the actual playing time, and often they are broadcast live. Chess gets thoroughly researched and examined with the help of computers. The romantic fresco paintings covering chess have been removed, and numerous holes were exposed as a result. A magic spell has been removed from chess and it remains a big question for me whether it will ever be possible to restore it.

When I replay the games of the great old masters and compare them with the modern games, I get the impression that the ruins of beauty are even more striking than beauty itself. However impressive modern glass-and-concrete buildings may be, the Pompei ruins are no less impressive. It is impossible to say which music is 'better' – old or modern – and in the same way we can't say what chess gives us more pleasure – Greco, Morphy, Steinitz, Capablanca, Tal or Kasparov. But fortunately chess is very versatile, and different people like different things about it.

It is very difficult to fairly judge the events of twenty, thirty, forty years ago from the position of present times. The realities of life are very flexible and transient. It is especially true when we talk about Soviet times, its rules, its laws – official or unwritten.

When I think about Soviet chess and about some of its concepts that become more and more vague and sometimes even incomprehensible for the new generations with every passing year, I ask myself if it is really necessary to preserve memories of this relatively narrow area of our culture? I think the answer to this question can only be a positive one. There is no doubt that every human experience is worth analysing and systematising, including that rather special experience on which modern chess is based. This allows us to make conclusions not only about the game itself but also about the system that facilitated its development.

When Herz studied the electromagnetic light theory he said that mathematical formulas have their own life. The same is true about chess, about its beauty and logic. Chess is more intelligent than we are – or even more intelligent than its creator. Modern chess can't

exist without using the French curves of the past. I tried to tell you about people that created these French curves. I wanted to write their names in the sand before the waves will erase them for ever and they will dissolve in the ocean of computer chess of the 21st century. Many of the people I write about, I met in person when I still physically lived in Leningrad, but in my mind already emigrated to the West. So the words that you'll read were written in the second half of my life, because at the time when the events took place I only had some vague feelings that I was not able to adequately express in words.

When, more than thirty years ago, I left the Soviet Union I wanted to leave all the past behind as soon as possible, but only after I put my seal on the past did I realise the difference between what I tried to run away from and what I regretted having left behind. For those who stayed in the USSR, I became a strange phenomenon: in contradiction with Saadi's sad saying: Some are deceased, others wander far away. I was for many both a distant friend and a deceased one.

My life in Leningrad was unfolding like an endless tape, but now I feel that time passes much faster for me. This is probably what everybody feels when approaching the end of the 'journey'... It is just like an hourglass that has been in use for a long time and its waist got wider, so the sand falls faster than when it was new. At the end of our lives we don't feel so much that we are getting older but that the world around us is getting younger. And most of all this applies to the chess world. It's a paradox that chess is becoming more and more complicated – but chess players' personalities are getting more and more primitive. Probably the reason is that top-level chess requires more time and effort and doesn't leave much space for other activities and hobbies.

In this book I also talk about people I met only after moving to the West. I tried to describe these people not only from the perspective of chess but also through their relations with other people and the society which is very different from what I experienced in the first half of my life. I tried to show what worries them, what they are

like in communication with other people, what kind of mistakes they make, what tricks they use to reach their goals – which is not less interesting than their games. While talking about other people I was rediscovering my own self and overcoming the natural embarrassment that we all experience when we have to talk about ourselves.

In the hierarchy of modern values, chess takes a modest, a very modest place compared to literature, music, and even to practically all other sports. Moreover, the future prospects of chess are not at all clear. But trying to predict the future is senseless: we may get such surprises which neither pessimists nor optimists could think about in their wildest dreams. That is why I wrote about the past of chess, but in this past you will make many new and unexpected discoveries.

Amsterdam, July 2003

The Cat that Walked by Himself

Tony Miles 1955-2001

At the tournament in Nottingham in 1936 Capablanca and Alexander were analysing together the game that they had just finished. 'Take a look at this!' exclaimed the English master, cheerfully looking around at those watching. 'Capablanca caught me, and with what a move! Amazing', he continued, looking admiringly at his famous opponent. The two-times British champion Conel Hugh O'Donel Alexander went to King Edward's School in Birmingham, in which several decades later the future first English grandmaster Tony Miles also spent his school years. Alexander won the British schoolboys' championship in 1926, and Miles won an analogous event more than four decades later. But how different was their approach to chess and to the greats of the chess world. There can be no doubt that, if Miles had had to play the famous maestro, he would not have showered the legendary champion with compliments, either after the game, or even mentally during it. More probably he would have thought: 'Well, hold on you beauty, let's see what you're really made of, let's test your much-vaunted intuition...'

For the pre-war generation of English players, when sitting down to play against grandmasters, the limit of their dreams was a draw. Their rare wins can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and besides, they were mostly the result of their famous opponents playing unjustifiably for a win, not wishing to concede even half a point to these obvious amateurs, and overstepping the mark in search of victory.

After the war the situation changed little. Soviet grandmasters dominated in the world arena, and kept generations of English players in a state of unlimited respect. This continued until Tony Miles appeared on the scene. He was as though born for chess; he had an innate sense of confidence in himself, which is so necessary for successful play at high level, not a superficial one, developed by autogenic training sessions or visits to a psychologist, but an inborn one: that boundless belief in yourself under any circumstances and despite anything. His passion for the game and for winning pushed everything in his life into the back-

ground. This obsession, this passion distinguished Tony Miles from other English players.

He defeated Boris Spassky, Mikhail Tal, Anatoly Karpov, Vasily Smyslov, Viktor Kortchnoi, Efim Geller and Lev Polugaevsky. One distinguished grandmaster from the Soviet Union complained at the time: 'I like all the players from England, except Miles – he does not treat me with the respect I am used to.'

His entire chess career can be arbitrarily divided into three periods. The first, beginning in 1968, when he became British under-fourteen champion; then, growing successes in weekend and open tournaments, culminating in his brilliant victory in the World Junior Championship in the Philippines and the seizure of the grandmaster title. He became a grandmaster at the age of twenty, achieving his final norm at a tournament in Dubna, in the Soviet Union – a barrier which yielded to only a few in those times. 'If you are successful, please send us a telegram', he was asked before this trip by the Secretary of the British Chess Federation. The telegram which arrived at the Federation contained only one word: 'Telegram', and signified not only that Miles received the sum of £5000 – the prize offered by the financier Jim Slater to the first British grandmaster – but also victory in the imaginary competition for this prize with his rivals Bill Hartston and Raymond Keene.

The appearance of the first English grandmaster was the start of a big chess boom in the country. Tony Miles became the leader of a generation of players – Jonathan Speelman, John Nunn, Michael Stean, Jonathan Mestel – which brought England out of the chess wilderness and transformed it into a powerful chess state, one of the strongest in the world.

The second period of Miles' career began with a joint victory with Kortchnoi at the IBM tournament in Amsterdam in 1976 and continued for roughly ten years. Miles was then one of the strongest players in the world, and for a time the best player in the West. During this decade he gained numerous resounding victories. The most impressive were at the Interpolis tournaments of 1984 and 1985 – the strongest events in the world at that time.

In this latter tournament he played lying on a massage table. But despite the pain and the physical discomfort, was he really so unhappy

with the situation? A challenge was thrown down to the remaining participants in the tournament, some of whom reacted angrily to the strange playing situation, which brought chess onto the front pages of the newspapers. But the main thing, as Miles himself wrote in *New In Chess Magazine*, was this: 'There are few things that motivate me more than a challenge, but there is one, and that is an impossible challenge. From this moment on I needed no further incentive. The impossible challenge was clear: to win Interpolis despite being a virtual cripple.'

The third, concluding stage of his career began with his loss in a match to Kasparov in Basle in 1986 by a crushing score ($\frac{1}{2}$ -5 $\frac{1}{2}$), after which his success curve took a downwards turn.

In his last years, when he had lost much of his practical strength and was condemned to playing in open tournaments, he no longer frequently met strong opponents. I am sure, however, that even those who out-rated him in that final period of his life, knew that they, when sitting down at the board with Tony Miles, had to be very much on their guard.

How did he play? In his approach to chess one could notice the features of players of such different strength and style as Basman, Larsen and Andersson. From the first he had elements of originality and eccentricity, from the second – fighting spirit, an uncompromising attitude and a complete lack of respect for acknowledged authorities, and from Ulf Andersson – a brilliant endgame technique. He could transform even a tiny advantage into a point: he had the patience, energy and desire to do this. I think that Miles began studying chess with the endgame, and not with the opening. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of players, he was not greatly interested in this part of the game. He always regarded the opening as a prelude to the middlegame, to the endgame, to a prolonged battle with inventions and trickery.

In their time, experienced trainers in the Soviet Union advised their pupils to keep a special notebook, where they could enter unusual manoeuvres, non-routine decisions, original plans and paradoxical combinations. From the games of Tony Miles you could gather material for more than one such notebook. I think this was most typical of him: to think up something unusual at the board, to devise a new and original idea. It was even better if at the same time this idea led the opponent

away from his well-trodden theoretical paths, and caused him mental discomfort. In one of our games in Tilburg after 1.c4 e5 Tony replied 2.♖c2, and with a grin, looked at me: that's the end of your theory, this move doesn't lose, and as for the white pieces, what significance does that have...

In the initial stage of the game he preferred to go his own way. He also did this in his best years, but then this became a necessity, since Tony never liked working on the opening, especially in the way that modern professional chess demands. Effectively he tried to play Fischer Chess, although the pieces on the board stood on their usual classical positions. In his last years he called representatives of the young generation 'database kids', probably not thinking about the fact that these were the children of 'the children of Informator', as a quarter of a century earlier Tigran Petrosian had called the young. I am sure, however, that Tony Miles did not come under this definition.

In reply to 1.e4 he could, depending on his mood, bring out either his queen's or his king's knight; playing Black, on the second move, and even on the first, he could prepare the fianchetto of his queen's bishop – a strategy, unequivocally condemned by the classical opening guides – and, moreover, he was not afraid to do this at top level. The variations employed by Miles often lacked that academic foundation of the opening classics, who from the very first moves set up a solid edifice. But Tony did not in fact aim for this: these variations served him for quite concrete aims: success at the given moment, in this specific game, in this tournament, because Tony Miles very much loved chess, but even more he loved winning.

Just as a runner who regularly engages in this occupation develops in his blood a special substance to which he becomes accustomed, so also for Tony Miles this substance entered his blood with the starting of the clocks. He regarded chess as a wrestling match on 64 squares, not classical wrestling, but freestyle. He did not belong to that small category of chess professionals for whom the following are completely unacceptable: agreeing to a draw before a game, offering a draw when it is not your turn to move, offering a draw two or three times in succession, playing a series of moves in the opponent's time trouble, offering a draw in an obviously inferior position, or bashing the clock with a piece that has just been captured.

Over a quarter of a century we played about twenty games in various countries and on various continents; he won four, and I won three. I can picture him entering the playing hall and heading for our board. He takes off his rather large watch and lays it down beside his score-sheet: within a few moments normal time will come to a stop and another reading of it will begin, determined by the position of the hands on both faces of the chess clock. This time will be recorded by him on his scoresheet – as far as I remember, he always did this. During the game his watch will lie on the scoresheet itself: he had the habit of first writing down his move and only then making it on the board, and when taking the most important decisions he would once again lift up the watch, and, defending with the back of his hand against the opponent's possible glance, check once again the recorded move. Now he arranges his knights side-on to the opponent, as they are depicted in the chess diagrams of books. Then he says 'j'adoube', correcting the ideally placed pieces; this phrase and this movement will be repeated by him several times in the game.

The round begins; he takes up his fighting position: bending cat-like and leaning forward, he holds his temples in his hands, all concentration and intensity, his gaze directed at the board. From time to time he straightens up and, throwing back his long hair, again assumes his former position. On the wrist of one hand is a gold chain with the inscription 'Tony', and on one of the fingers of his other hand is a ring. Now he takes out a large handkerchief, and despite the absence of any cold, he begins noisily blowing his nose, periodically repeating this procedure during the game.

His opponent is engrossed in thought; he stands up, with a girdling movement pulling up his trousers; the time has come to drink something, and he already has a glass in his hands: the two-litre jug of milk, always standing in the refrigerator in the playing room during the tournament in Tilburg, would gradually empty towards the end of the round. From time to time he belches, sometimes covering his mouth with his hand, sometimes not. Occasionally he casts brief glances at his opponent; in them there is everything: smile, triumph, anxiety, surprise, suspicion – depending on the position on the board. He never looks, as timid souls do, into the eyes of colleagues who stop by his table, in order to read the evaluation of the position on the board in

their eyes: he is accustomed to relying on himself alone and it does not concern him what others think.

Time trouble arrives. Raising himself slightly on his chair, he spreads his hands, urging back those standing around his board who have entered his field of view, his living space: participants, arbiters, demonstrators.

Play has gone deep into the endgame, and his pawn has reached the penultimate rank; now he will promote it – to a rook? to a bishop? This occurred more than once in his games, including ours. Now all the pieces have been exchanged, the last pawn has disappeared from the board, but he likes positions when only the kings remain on the board.

The game has ended: the watch is removed from the scoresheet, now it is again on his wrist, and normal time has resumed. In analysis after the game he was never condescending towards his opponent, making little jokes from time to time.

Exactly the same was the writing style of Tony Miles, the author of numerous articles and commentaries. The distinguishing quality of them was the specific humour, scepticism, irony and self-irony, merciless in the evaluation of his opponent, but also of himself. He, naturally, avoided quoting anyone: in chess, as in life, no authorities existed. About one chess book, Miles wrote a review which consisted of two words: 'Utter crap.'

He was a master of the laconic barb, the sarcastic remark, and he was never at a loss for words. The thirteen-year-old Stuart Conquest, when meeting at the board with the famous grandmaster, in a position from the Catalan Opening gave a queen check on move five, and childishly announced: 'Check!' Miles' reaction followed immediately: 'Is it?'

In one of the New York Opens Boris Gulko started extremely badly and after the third round he was trailing his wife, grandmaster Anna Akhshamurova, by a full one and a half points. 'Are you also playing in this tournament?' greeted Miles him, when Gulko appeared on the stage in the vicinity of the boards where the leaders were meeting.

'How did you find she played?' someone asked the same Gulko after a game with Sofia Polgar. 'She made mistake after mistake', he heatedly replied, after he had saved a lost ending, having overlooked something in a winning position. 'She made mistake after mistake, which probably explains why he survived two pawns down in an opposite bishop ending', wrote Tony in *New In Chess Magazine*.

I first saw Miles when he was eighteen years old; with his long hair down to his shoulders and his delicate skin, he in some way resembled Oscar Wilde's 'Bosie'. Then his appearance changed, it acquired something cat-like, in his face, in his way of moving, and he began to resemble one of the musketeers, first Aramis, and then Porthos. In the last period of his life he put on a great deal of weight, and his face became puffy, but there was still the long hair down to the shoulders, and in his entire appearance there was something of the captain of a pirate ship from a story by Robert Louis Stevenson, all that was missing being the parrot on his shoulder and the bottle of rum.

If people in the enormous world of professional and amateur chess are separated into two categories – those few about whom they talk, and those who talk – Tony Miles would certainly belong to the first category. His adventures, crankiness and eccentricity became known in this artificial world, where everyone knows everything about one another. For all that, it did not interest him in the slightest what they said about him, or what they thought – in the British Chess Federation, in FIDE, what Karpov did not like, or how Kasparov would react. He was not afraid to appear ridiculous, arriving as trainer of the Australian ladies' team at the Olympiad in Manila, or playing, lying on a massage table, as he did in Tilburg, or simply on a mattress, laid out for him in the corner of the hall at an open tournament in Ostend one week later.

When travelling one day to the playing hall in Tilburg, Miles decided simply to lie on the back seat of the taxi, trying to find the optimal position for his spine. 'I decided it was time to forget about appearances', he later wrote in his report. Appearances? All his life he was not greatly concerned about them.

Tony learned to play chess when he was five years old. Then the game was forgotten and a real interest in it was aroused only when someone brought a chess set to the primary school he attended. 'Had it not been for that', he later remembered, 'I would probably never have taken it up.'

He completed one year at the Department of Mathematics in Sheffield, after which he switched completely to professional chess. Later he recalled that he had been bored at the lectures: 'Here there were no opponents to beat – not like chess. I need a direct challenge.' For his ser-

vices to chess Sheffield University awarded him an honorary degree (MA). There was some disagreement about this decision: some insisted on awarding the former student Miles the honorary title, but others demanded that he be excluded from the list for negligence. Tony did not like ceremonies and had an ironic regard for such procedures – well-known is his speech at the closing ceremony of the tournament in Brussels in 1986: ‘I hate this sort of appearance, but here I will be brief: in this tournament there was nothing that I could criticise.’ In a word of thanks in Sheffield he said that for him it was a great shock to receive the honorary title, since he had not been a good student. But he also did not hide the fact that he was very pleased for his services to be marked in this way.

He did not receive an academic education, but, as in chess, he did not really need it, and he did not experience any particular piety towards his fellow-grandmasters who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge. And although his relations with the future king of English chess, Nigel Short, were frequently troubled, Miles himself admitted that Nigel and subsequently Mickey Adams were closer to him in spirit than the Oxbridge set.

In the mid-1980s I did not yet know about the details of his conflict with Raymond Keene and with the British Chess Federation. A conflict which grew and took on serious forms, an escalation of all these problems, and which certainly played a major role in his very serious nervous breakdown, his grave mental illness.

In the autumn of 1987, for the anniversary of the Hilversum Chess Club in Holland, Ian Rogers, John van der Wiel, Tony Miles and I were invited. The program of the festival included both consultation games and simultaneous displays, which the grandmasters gave against the club members and against each other.

From his very arrival in Holland, a strangeness in Miles’ behaviour was noticeable, and it became even more obvious on the day when play took place. Going out into the audience watching the simultaneous display, Tony took a cup of tea from one of the spectators and began slowly stirring it with a pawn he had removed from the board. In reply to the perplexed glances, he explained that the cup was Raymond Keene, and the sandwich which another visitor was holding, was David

Anderton. During the display Tony suddenly offered draws on all boards; in the event of refusal – only Ian Rogers agreed – he immediately resigned the games. At the time it seemed like the crankiness of an already eccentric maestro, and not a severe form of mental illness, which it in fact turned out to be.

On returning to England, Tony was arrested by the police when he tried to climb over the barriers to 10 Downing Street, whether it was to explain to the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher the incorrectness of her cabinet's policies, or to complain about Raymond Keene, who, as he asserted, had made several attempts on his life. On another occasion he was arrested for hurling stones at a passing lorry.

Tony Miles became a patient at a psychiatric clinic and added his name to the already considerable list of chess players burdened with mental problems. The doctors advised him to give up playing forever, to avoid stressful situations and to abandon the world of chess. Need it be said that this advice was as correct as it was useless. And indeed, was it correct? After all, it is well-known that for the organism of people who have mental problems, the benefit from the fact that they give up smoking is cancelled out by an aggravation of their overall condition: apathy, emotional reticence, withdrawal, and further nervous breakdowns.

And Miles continued to play, and play, and play. He always played frequently, very frequently. Late in the evening, after the closing ceremony of a major international tournament, he climbed into his Mercedes: Germany was awaiting and a game in the Bundesliga, and within a couple of days an open tournament in Mexico was starting.

His next breakdown occurred a few years later in China. A different, unusual country, different people, and an incomprehensible language. The beds in the hotel rooms were low and Tony, who had already surprised the hosts with his behaviour, requested that it be raised. When two of the hotel staff carried out his request, it transpired that the guest was not looking for anything under the bed, but after lying down on the floor asked for it to be put back... At the end of that ill-fated tournament in China, when Cathy Rogers phoned him to ask whether he would be taking part in an open tournament beginning within a few days in Australia, Miles gave a positive answer, and in reply to the

question of when he would be arriving, he said: yesterday. He never appeared at that tournament.

By that time Tony had left England. He tried to live in America, and then in Australia. In America, he, unsuccessfully, took part in the championship of the country, and in Australia he regularly played in tournaments, even intending to represent this country. During this Australian part of his life he got married for the second time to a very young woman, an Australian of Chinese descent, who had arrived with her family from Malaysia. This marriage ended soon in divorce, a very difficult divorce, which aggravated his mental problems and created material ones.

It is considered that his attempts at emigration were associated with his mental condition, his defeat in the match to Kasparov in 1986, and, last but not least, the fact that he lost his leading position in English chess after the emergence of Nigel Short. This is probably all so, although the inclination towards changes of place, to constant movement, were installed in his restless genes, and his profession, of course, merely aided this. In the late 1970s, when there was not even a cloud in the sky of his career, he once said that he would not be averse to moving to France. 'Do you speak French?' I asked him. 'Un peu. J'ai étudié français à l'école', Tony replied with dignity and with an accent that would prompt a puzzled 'Quoi?' from any Frenchman.

The problem of his relations with Nigel Short goes beyond the bounds of pure chess. It is much broader, and reduces to the question: how should a sportsman feel, when he has to concede the leading role. The role to which he is accustomed, and which appears reserved for him for ever. When he becomes number two, three, four, when he does not receive invitations to tournaments to which he is accustomed, and when he altogether fails to get into the team? This phenomenon is not known in social life, where positions won are lost only as a consequence of something extraordinary, and a deserved pension and respect normally crown the end of one's life.

Nigel Short was only ten, when he first met Tony Miles in an open tournament. And Miles was the first grandmaster whom the fourteen-year-old Nigel defeated in 1979.

'It cannot be said that Tony was my friend', Short recounts. 'For some time relations were bad, even very bad... Although we always felt

some kind of connection between us. When I was very young, Tony would jealously watch my games. 'That kid wants my job', he once said. It was not easy for him playing me, and I won against him quite often. In 1986 our relations hit a low point, when Miles, as a member of the selection committee, put himself on board one for the national team at the Olympiad in Dubai, although by that time my rating was some 50 points higher than his. I also remember that Kasparov was completely amazed then that I was not playing on board one. At the time I was very offended by this, and I have to admit that even now I have a feeling of irritation when I talk about it. Incidentally, our team played excellently there, but we scored all our points on boards two to five, whereas our board one suffered a fiasco...

'In my opinion, with his behaviour at the board he quite deliberately disturbed his opponent, and he was not above using some slightly dubious means and was not averse to cheating.

'Later our relations improved, and in Elista, for example, we spent quite a lot of time together, often laughing to tears: Tony had a rather well developed sense of humour, and I always gained pleasure from reading his articles; they were never dry, and he wrote them in his special style. I mixed with him frequently in recent times, thus we spent quite a long time discussing play on the Internet with Bobby Fischer. For us it was clear that we were playing one and the same opponent, and it was a very courteous, erudite person, well-developed in every sense, whoever he was, in the end. Just two days before the European Championship in Leon he complained that they had not included him in the team, but preferred young Luke McShane, although his, Miles', rating was higher. He very much wanted to play.'

During the last quarter of a century England has produced a number of strong grandmasters, but only three of them, as it seems to me, have been leaders: Tony Miles, Nigel Short and more recently – Michael Adams. I think, incidentally, that the reason for the improvement in relations between Miles and Short in recent years can be explained simply: the rising star of Michael Adams. Thus, after the appearance of a new first wife in the sultan's harem, one can see, walking hand in hand, and harmoniously chatting with each other, the second and third wives, who once lived in bitter rivalry.

In 1995 in the Zonal tournament in Linares Miles was leading after the sixth round, demonstrating solid, confident play. In the seventh round he lost to Illescas effectively while still in the opening. That evening I met Tony in the hotel corridor. 'It's all over, I don't have any chances', were his surprisingly uncustomary words. 'What do you mean', I said, 'you're still in a good position, and your plus score is quite sufficient to qualify.' 'You don't understand', he smiled ironically, 'I can't sleep at all. I've already phoned my doctor in Birmingham. You don't know what it is not to sleep...'

From this moment the tournament saw another Miles. The point was not even that he lost once more, and did not win once – it was obvious that not only was he no longer able to concentrate, he could not even think anymore; he had acquired the 'shakes', which are familiar to all chess players. He could no longer cope with the excitement and keep the game under control. In his collapse in the decisive encounter with Van der Sterren, where he would have been satisfied with a draw as White, Miles played instantly, and already after 15 moves his position was in ruins. When a few moves later Miles resigned, the impression was that he had already reconciled himself to the inevitable, and that he had not expected any other outcome.

In his last years Tony, who had once received appearance fees that considerably exceeded those of his fellow-grandmasters, and were perhaps inferior only to those of Karpov, agreed to play in open tournaments in conditions which had young players shaking their heads in surprise. I think that they simply did not understand what it signified for Miles not to play at all, to step out of the ring, to change the way of life to which he had become accustomed during his 25-year intensive career of a professional chess player. A few years ago Miles proposed to the boss of the Porz team that he should play for his club on the following conditions: if he did not score 90% over the season, he would not demand any fee for his efforts. Anyone who is familiar with the standard of play in the Bundesliga will understand what such an offer signifies, and therefore it came as no surprise that at the end of the season Miles did not receive a single Pfennig.

In the late 1970s, a few hours before the first round in Lone Pine, after a lengthy flight from Europe to Los Angeles and a five-hour bus ride to

the small Californian town, I met Tony in the main and effectively only street of the capital of what was then the strongest Open in the world, and I began complaining of tiredness and of aeroplane noise in my ears. Miles merely shrugged his shoulders: this condition was customary for him. The places where Tony lived: Birmingham, Andorra, Porz were merely bivouacs, where he could pause for breath in more customary surroundings before his real home: the hotel bed, the aeroplane seat, the train bunk or ship cabin, the car seat. From the names of the towns and countries in which he played chess, one can study geography, and a line connecting all the places he visited would describe a curious curve, encompassing the earth many times.

And, of course, it was all the same to him where he played: in Cuba, Colombia, New Zealand, China, Holland, Egypt, or the Soviet Union. During the Olympiad in Elista in 1998 he was making plans to play in a tournament in Iraq: first by plane to Damascus, then by camel or yak to Baghdad. The greater part of Miles' career fell in the pre-computer, pre-Internet times, and a future biographer will face a great deal of work, looking for his games in the archives of the Egyptian, Colombian and Chinese Chess Federations.

His talent was very natural, native, and was combined with an enormous vital strength, which was in him and was sensed almost physically. He was not averse to a drink, he ate a great deal, and was trained by his lengthy travels to be not particularly squeamish.

Stuart Conquest remembers how once he shared a cabin with Tony on a boat from England to the Continent. 'His snoring was so deafening, that I couldn't shut my eyes, so I got dressed and went to the bar.'

Miles was twice married, he had girlfriends, good acquaintances, and rare friends, or those who considered themselves as such. Despite this, he was of course a lone wolf, with his inner world, his complexes and his problems. Like every Englishman he was slightly eccentric, but he wanted to appear more eccentric than he was in actual fact.

At the end of his life he returned to his native Birmingham; travelling the world, he had heard plenty of broken English; he himself remained an Englishman, and not only by his love for cricket, which he retained from childhood. It is noteworthy that Miles did not like London and never lived there – in contrast to the majority of English chess players, or perhaps precisely for this reason.

1982. Indonesia. A free day in a tournament lasting 25 rounds. An excursion to Borobudur – one of the seven wonders of the world. The sun is burning down mercilessly. The fair-haired Tony is wearing a panama hat, but he is already quite badly burnt. He is keeping apart, of course, from the rest of the chess caravan. There are hundreds of Buddhas, sitting in various poses. One of them is a tourist attraction: a hollow statue, in which you are supposed to stick your hand while making a wish. I notice that Miles stands for a long time by the statue, to the displeasure of a group of Americans waiting their turn, headed by a guide with an unopened parasol lifted high over his head. Finally, Tony moves away from the figure sitting in the lotus position and notices me. Covering his mouth with the back of his hand, as if he wants to pass on something confidential, he whispers: ‘I couldn’t think of a single wish...’

In 1980 at the European Team Championship in Skara, Miles won against World Champion Karpov, by replying to the move of the king’s pawn with 1...a6. Jonathan Speelman played in that USSR-England match on the next board with Efim Geller. I asked him whether Miles had received permission from his team captain for such an eccentric opening experiment. ‘Permission?’ Jonathan repeated. ‘Tony Miles never asked anyone for permission for anything...’

He was one of the best players in the world at that recent and distant time when there were no computers, checking every move and every variation, and no enormous data bases with millions of games, extractable at the push of a single key. That time, still so close, and yet also so distant, now seems naïve, primitive and even wild, just as the best players of those times seem ‘as wild as wild could be – and they walked in the Wet Wild Woods by their wild lones. But the wildest of all the wild animals was the Cat. He walked by himself, and all places were alike to him.’

December 2001

Obsession

On the occasion of Viktor Kortchnoi's 70th birthday

On 9th march 1996 a big chess festival was held in Groningen. Among the grandmasters giving a simultaneous display was Viktor Kortchnoi. A month earlier, when out skiing, he had broken his leg. Although the cast had been removed and his crutch had been replaced by a stick that resembled an upturned ski stick, he was still having difficulty in walking. I had concluded my simul and was watching from the side as he moved along the tables. In some games the battle was still at its height, and the organisers were looking meaningfully at their watches: the time when the display was due to finish was approaching. 'Try offering a draw', I suggested to one of the players, who had quite a decent position. 'I've already offered one, but he didn't reply.' 'Try again, perhaps he didn't hear you.' 'Draw?' repeated Kortchnoi, who had hobbled up to the board. 'Dank u wel!' (Thank you very much!) he replied, bashing out a bishop sacrifice.

Two weeks before this display I had been playing with him in Cannes, in a tournament where representatives of the older generation met with the strongest French juniors. Kortchnoi climbed laboriously onto the stage of the Palais des Festivals, shoved the crutch under his chair, found a comfortable position for his leg in its cast, and got down to business. The juniors failed the exam set by the maestro: out of the ten games in the tournament he dropped only half a point. After the games were finished, he would analyse them for hours, and would be one of the last to leave the tournament hall. Petra, his wife, as usual used to sit close by, reading or solving another crossword. From the side of the stage where his board was placed, there carried his characteristic chuckling and laughter, and, if you looked more closely, in the famous maestro you could discern the Kortchnoi of the time of the USSR Championship semifinal somewhere in 1949, in Sverdlovsk, when he himself had been the age of his present opponents.

On a cold autumn day in the hungry Leningrad of 1944, a thirteen-year-old youth simultaneously joined three clubs in the Pioneers' Palace: recitation, music and chess. Fortunately for chess, he was found to have incorrect pronunciation, and he had no piano at home... Chess became the main thing in his life, and then even life itself. His autobiography, written more than two decades ago, is called just this: *Chess is my Life*. In fact, it is his life's conception, a conception to which he remains true to this day.

I am sure that the grey matter concerned with chess occupies a much greater volume in Kortchnoi's brain than is the case with any other player. Greater even than with the best-known names that are to be found today at the top of the strongest international tournaments and in matches for the World Championship. Apart from enormous chess talent, tenacity and character, there are two qualities that distinguish Kortchnoi among his many colleagues: his boundless love for the game, and his absolute honesty in analysis. Honesty, which at times is merciless with regard to his opponent, but in particular to himself.

In the late 1960s and early '70s I helped Viktor to prepare for his Candidates' matches for the World Championship. It would happen that, after a long day spent analysing, in conversation over dinner I would notice that he was looking past me. His replies would become vague, and I knew that within a short time there would follow a reply such as: 'In the position where we cut short our analysis, things are by no means so good for Black. If White plays, say, knight b5, what will you do?' The process of analysis, the search for truth, can go on endlessly for Kortchnoi, and this search is no less important for him than the fruits of the work itself.

Once, after he had found a new idea as a result of a lengthy analysis, I advised him not to employ it in a tournament that seemed to me less significant, but to keep it for some more important event. 'For another tournament I'll think up something else', replied Viktor. 'I don't store up novelties.'

When Kortchnoi plays chess, he forgets about everything. Tal once told me that before a simultaneous display in Havana, Viktor was told: 'You will be playing Che Guevara. He is a rather weak player, but he loves

chess passionately. He would be delighted if he were able to gain a draw.' Kortchnoi understandingly nodded his head. A few hours later he returned to the hotel. 'Well?' Tal enquired. 'I crushed them all, all without exception!' 'And Che Guevara?' 'Che Guevara? I also crushed Che Guevara – he hasn't a clue about the Catalan Opening!'

I helped Viktor in the 1970 USSR Championship in Riga. It was a frosty January, and in the building where the tournament was being played, a sewage pipe burst. First this was sensed by the spectators, who gradually began leaving the tournament hall, and soon the chief arbiter was forced to announce a temporary break. The players, exchanging jokes, began moving off the stage. The lone figure of Kortchnoi remained at the chess board. 'What's the matter?' he asked, raising his head, of the arbiter who had stopped his clock. 'Has something happened?'

Even in his mature years, when he had energy to spare, he knew that during a tournament it all had to be devoted to chess. Excursions on free days, receptions, meetings, hassle – all such distractions had to be avoided. 'What will I do? I won't do anything. I'll stay at home, relax, and think about the game', he once said in the early seventies.

He keeps himself in good shape. Many years ago, in the Leningrad period of his life, he was driving on the Vasilev Island when he crashed into a State Vehicle Inspectorate car. 'From that time I stopped driving and was forced to walk. I still walk a lot', says Kortchnoi. During the winter he also goes skiing.

He does not smoke now, but that was not always the case. An inveterate smoker since he was young, he has several times given it up. Once he did this – which is inconceivable for a smoker! – during a tournament, after losing a game, voluntarily enchaining himself: by punishing his flesh, he hardened his spirit.

After concluding a game, Viktor is not in a hurry to leave the tournament hall. He moves from board to board, stopping by positions that attract his attention. He stands in a characteristic pose, occasionally rocking from side to side, and from his glance directed at the board, the rapid rising and lowering of his eyebrows, one can follow the unceasing working of his brain, occupied in the analysis of variations of a chess game. Only when the variations have been calculated and an

evaluation of the position made, does he slowly move on to the next game, where he again becomes engrossed in another labyrinth of variations.

Kortchnoi's jubilee coincides with another anniversary: one hundred years ago in Amsterdam Max Euwe was born, without whom on the chess map of the world Holland would have probably been situated somewhere alongside Austria and Denmark. This year Euwe and Kortchnoi have a jointly memorable date. On 5th July 1976 – a quarter of a century ago – immediately after the opening ceremony of the IBM tournament in Amsterdam, Euwe, who was then President of FIDE, and Kortchnoi, who was playing in that tournament, had a conversation. Already then Kortchnoi spoke English well, but he asked me to act as interpreter. I translated impassively, although I recognised well the importance of the occasion. Euwe understood everything at once. 'Of course, Viktor', he said, 'you will retain all your rights in the candidates matches; don't be worried, we'll help you,' and so on.

The following day I went off to the Interzonal tournament in Switzerland. We spoke several times by phone. 'You are winning against all the wrong players – well, what does Smejkal matter? – whereas you are losing...' Kortchnoi remarked on one occasion, having in mind my losses to Geller and especially Petrosian, with whom his relations were hostile. It was for this reason that one result from the ninth round gave him particular pleasure. That day the Colombian master Oscar Castro won against Petrosian. 'Give Castro a hundred dollars and say to him that this is a 'reward'; remember this word: 'reward'!' And he gave his characteristic laugh: 'Castro beat Petrosian! Hrg, hrg.' When that evening I handed Castro his 'reward', for a long time he didn't understand, but in the end the penny dropped.

The morning of 26th July 1976. Biel. A newspaper kiosk. And suddenly my eyes are dazzled by the large headlines on the front pages: ANOTHER ONE HAS CHOSEN FREEDOM!

For Kortchnoi the concept of freedom meant primarily the opportunity to play chess without being subject to the laws and demands of the now non-existent State, which demanded unquestioning obedience of all its citizens. He was not a dissident in the direct sense of this word in

the Soviet Union: danger threatened his chess career. The State, by taking his family hostage, forced him to become a dissident.

The place of chess in world culture is less significant, of course, than literature, music or ballet. However, whereas the names of Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky, Rostropovich and Baryshnikov could be avoided being mentioned in the country which had thrown them out, by not publishing their books and by completely keeping quiet about concerts and performances, with Kortchnoi it was much more difficult. Regularly meeting at the chess board with representatives of the Soviet Union, playing matches for the World Championship, he provoked the smouldering fury of the authorities, by constantly reminding millions of his former fellow-citizens of his existence. In reports in the newspapers, radio and television, his name was usually concealed behind the faceless word 'opponent' or 'challenger', and in official articles: 'turncoat' or 'traitor'. But for the reason that it was not printed and was pronounced only in a whisper, it resounded inside the country louder than any fanfare. At that time he made chess a matter of state importance, and everything that happened in matches for the World Championship was reported to the leaders of the Soviet Union directly by telephone, like communiqués from a battlefield.

The boycott of events to which Kortchnoi was invited, although not declared officially by the Soviet Chess Federation, was pretty effective. It has been calculated that over a period of seven years he 'lost' several dozen major international tournaments.

More than twenty years ago in Amsterdam, where the FIDE office was then accommodated, a press conference took place. The Soviet stance was predictable: 'There is no Kortchnoi boycott! Soviet players themselves, who personally know Kortchnoi very well, refuse to play against him.' For the difficult demonstration of this theorem, Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky, then the head of the Chess Section in the USSR Sports Committee, had come to Amsterdam. 'Even if your assertion is accepted, how can you explain the fact that Romanishin and Tseshkovsky, whose participation in the Lone Pine tournament had been announced, refused to go on learning that Kortchnoi was playing there?' he was asked. 'After all, they are representatives of a new generation and hardly know Kortchnoi.' 'That's true', agreed Baturinsky,

'they were due to go to the tournament and came to us in the Federation for advice. Generally speaking, this tournament cannot be recommended, we said, but decide for yourselves.'

The last question was asked by Hans Ree: 'Fifty years ago in Soviet Russia, Alekhine was called a monarchist and a white guard. Now in Moscow a tournament is played in his honour. At the moment Kortchnoi in the Soviet Union is a turncoat and a traitor. Do you not think that in twenty years' time a tournament named after him will be held?' Something resembling a smile appeared on Baturinsky's face. He took out a cigar, lit it, and after blowing out a cloud of smoke, he said: 'I do not know what will be in twenty years' time. In twenty years' time I, in any event, will not be here.'

Looking into the future is indeed difficult: Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky is preparing to celebrate his 87th birthday, and in St Petersburg celebrations dedicated to the seventieth anniversary of Viktor Lvovich Kortchnoi have been held.

In recent times Kortchnoi has often said: 'I play chess in order to show young lads that there is still something they can learn from me. At the tournament in the Dutch town of Tilburg in 1998 he reprimanded Vadim Zviagintsev: 'Why didn't you play on in this position? You had chances. Dangerous? Then you'd be better not playing chess at all, if you find it dangerous.' After a game from the last round it was Peter Svidler who caught it: 'Aren't you ashamed of agreeing a draw after half an hour with white against Anand? Isn't it interesting to play Anand? Is it every day that you have the chance to play Anand? Yesterday against Kramnik I too could have taken on d5 in the Slav and would definitely not have lost, but I don't play that way and I never will play that way, if I think there is a variation that leads to an advantage. Even if the position turns out to be dangerous and complicated. After all, it is complicated for both players.'

His uncompromising nature, motivation, and eagerness for a struggle are well-known. These qualities, together with a lively imagination in chess, are usually typical of youth, and with age they normally fall away. Experience is accumulated, novelty loses its attraction, and there is hardly anything to excite the imagination or to urge one on, as in one's younger years. With Viktor Kortchnoi this has not happened. He is still searching, analysing, preparing for tournaments, and playing.

'I don't need to go anywhere now, I have no need to fight for anything. I am an amateur', he says. If the word 'amateur' is given its original meaning, even then it reflects too faintly Viktor Kortchnoi's attitude to chess. For him chess is everything. He has been afforded a luck which is given to few: not only to do something which one is best at, but also to have a boundless love for it. Love? It is rather a fervent passion, an obsession, life itself. Without chess, life would become not simply uninteresting, but pointless.

During his career of more than half a century, Viktor Kortchnoi has played all the World Champions, beginning with Botvinnik, and all the strongest players of the present and the past, sometimes even of the very distant past. Even what appears impossible to others yields before his imagination and love for the game. A few years ago he transcended the real world when he won a prolonged game, a French defence, against one of the strongest players from the early twentieth century – Geza Maroczy. As the Hungarian grandmaster had been dead for many years, Kortchnoi had to resort to the help of a medium, who received Maroczy's moves from the other world. Stated the winner: 'Of course, one cannot be absolutely sure that the game was indeed played by Maroczy's spirit, but the entire course of it, with its not altogether certain handling of the opening, but good play in the endgame, is certainly evidence of this.'

For his anniversary Kortchnoi has made a present to all chess enthusiasts. A best games collection in two volumes, which is due to be published simultaneously in two languages, English and German, includes one hundred of Kortchnoi's games, with new annotations by him, fifty played with the white pieces, and fifty with black. This collection is essentially a splendid textbook on chess, painting a revealing portrait of one of the most remarkable masters of the game. 'I worked on each game for an average of three days. But inspiration is also needed, so you can work out how long I have spent on it', says the author. In the comments to one of the games Kortchnoi writes that he hopes that the reader, on playing it through, will gain pleasure from the full-blooded, far from routine battle. It is this that is most precious to him in the game: creativity and single combat, the battle of ideas on the chess board.

Like nearly all players of the older generation, Kortchnoi uses a computer merely as a database, only rarely resorting to it for advice. 'I do not especially favour a computer, mainly because it is irresponsible. What do I mean? I sacrifice a piece for an attack, for example, and it says: Black is winning. Two moves later it evaluates the position as equal, then I make a strong move, and it says: White is winning, then again Black. This is totally irresponsible!'

When a few years ago I began complaining of my lack of motivation, and of the tiredness that increasingly accumulated towards the end of a tournament, he merely remarked briefly: 'Fifty is no age.' Not only from his generation, but even from the following one, there is no one else who battles on equal terms with the young, forceful, well-trained professionals. Some have given up the game for good, while others appear from time to time in tournaments for veterans. Playing chess when you are elderly resembles the cruel custom in ancient times when slaves on galleys had their thumbs cut off: it was still possible to row, but not to throw a lance. Chess fans, who are only familiar by hearsay with the enormous tension, invariably present in the games of the great masters in modern chess, give him as an example: 'Look how Kortchnoi still plays.' They do not understand that here it is not just a matter of mastery and talent: his skill in giving himself up completely to chess is impossible to learn, just as it is impossible for an adult person to grow by even one centimetre.

It has long ceased to surprise him that he is the oldest participant in a tournament, in most cases by a large margin from the second oldest player. At the Olympiad in Istanbul he was told that there was a player of the same age in one of the teams. 'But I found out that he was born on 17th April, so all the same I am the oldest here', laughed Kortchnoi. He does not even feel himself to be old, since it is known that age is not so much the body becoming decrepit, as the indifference of the soul. It was strange to hear him saying in Istanbul that he had been studying chess too much in recent times and was tired. It appeared that he had abolished the very concept of tiredness.

A few years ago at the tournament in Wijk aan Zee, preparing for a game with Jan Timman, Kortchnoi remarked: 'Jan markedly tires towards the last hour of play. So I have decided to wear him out, by

maintaining the tension right to the end.' After the match that concluded recently in Donetsk, he said: 'The seventeen-year-old Ponomarev makes a mistake in the endgame, and all because he tires greatly towards the end of a game. Now, why should that be?'

He still experiences very emotionally what happens on the board, and is affected by defeats even more keenly than before. It can happen that he does not congratulate his opponents on winning, or that he attacks them for their – often perceived – failure to reply to a draw offer. It can happen that his significantly younger colleagues have to endure angry tirades, which not only give an evaluation of the positions that occurred during play, but also inform them of what Kortschnoi thinks about their play in general, and sometimes about themselves. They know from their own experience about the colossal mental and emotional stresses that accompany professional chess today, but only theoretically and speculatively can they imagine how these stresses affect a player of his age.

The 2000 Wijk aan Zee tournament went badly for Kortschnoi. 'Why, why did I play h6, why didn't I prepare queenside castling, and why did I take on g2?' he castigated himself after he had resigned to Anand on the 18th move. 'No, it's not so easy anymore for me to play such a long tournament.' But after winning a prolonged game in the last round against Piket, he was again full of energy: 'I have the feeling that the tournament has even been rather short.'

Kortschnoi's descriptions of players, like his thoughts about chess, are always apt and unexpected. He once advised Iosif Dorfman, who had complained that he had not won against an opponent who was significantly inferior to him in strength. 'You were pressing him so strongly that there was nothing for him to do but make forced moves. You should have allowed him to move about a little, and, you see, he would have thought up something.' In Cannes, observing the play of the young Fressinet in serious time trouble: 'Look, look, he has already begun advancing his pawns. This is a weakness of all trained strategists – myself included – in time trouble to begin playing with the pawns. You see, his position has already deteriorated.'

For him the age of a player does not play any role, because in chess, as also in literature or music, performers are not distinguished by years.

Therefore, when analysing a game with the twelve-year-old Teimour Radjabov, he talks with him as he would with an adult: 'Do you notice that at the end of the variation suggested by you, your king is left undefended? What if I sacrifice a knight?' he asks, paying no attention to the bright shining eyes and the trembling chin of his opponent.

In one of the bitter days of 1940, Winston Churchill declared to the demoralised ministers of the French cabinet: 'Whatever you may do, we shall fight on for ever, and ever, and ever.'

Kortchnoi has often repeated that he left the Soviet Union, in order to play chess. In this he sees his predestination, his fate. And however the rules of staging competitions change, and whichever new stars rise in the chess firmament, Viktor Kortchnoi will fight on for ever, and ever, and ever.

May 2003

Docendo Discimus

Vladimir Bagirov 1936-2000

The USSR Chess Championship in 1960 was played in Leningrad. And what a championship it was! Once you begin listing the names: Smyslov, Bronstein, Petrosian, Geller, Taimanov, Spassky, Kortchnoi, Polugaevsky, Averbakh, Simagin... it is hard to stop. I was in my final year at school, but that month I had no time for lessons. Almost every day I went to the tournament. The hall, which accommodated about a thousand people, was full. Of course, they were supporting their fellow-citizens. In that championship Spassky and Taimanov did not perform very successfully, and the Leningraders had their eyes fixed on 28-year-old Viktor Kortchnoi. The strength of Kortchnoi's play was known to everyone, but he had yet to win the championship of the country.

In the sixteenth round Viktor met a debutant in the championship, and everyone was hoping that he would become one of the sole leaders. Kortchnoi outplayed his opponent with black and gained a great advantage. The culminating point was reached. It was White's 27th move. After an exchange of rooks, Black's passed pawn would be almost at the prize square. Suddenly, Kortchnoi got up abruptly from the board and left the stage almost at a run. The sign appeared: 'White won.' There was noise in the hall, and laughter. The demonstrator, of course, had simply mixed things up. But almost immediately it transpired that the demonstrator was not wrong at all. Kortchnoi, instead of taking the enemy rook with his bishop, had picked up the other bishop, which was pointing into empty space. After waving the piece around in confusion, he promptly resigned. The involuntary offender against the favourite of the Leningrad fans, a tall, dark-haired man of Eastern appearance, merely spread his hands.

Kortchnoi nevertheless won his last three games and became champion of the country for the first time. His opponent in that dramatic game received a present, of course. He had played strongly, at grandmaster level, and, by taking fourth place, he finished ahead of many of the stars of Soviet chess. That tall, dark-haired man was Vladimir Bagirov.

Vladimir Konstantinovich Bagirov was born in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1936. At that time Baku was an international city, with Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Russians, Jews and Germans. People from the city, remembering those times, say that they all had one nationality, they were from Baku. Bagirov's mother was Ukrainian, and his father Armenian. An engineer, and a prominent oil specialist, he was arrested and shot in 1937, the year of the Great Terror. Volodya never knew his father. The mother and son moved from place to place and life was very hard.

Immediately after the war, at the age of ten, Bagirov decided to dabble at photography at the Baku Pioneers' Palace. There was such a demand, however, that a place for him was not found. He had to join the chess club, so that he might switch to photography the following year. Things turned out differently. The game entranced the boy. The first successes arrived, and chess became his favourite occupation and later his life's work.

After finishing school, Bagirov decided to follow in his father's footsteps. He completed a course at the oil institute and even worked for a couple of years as an engineer. Still, his love for chess proved stronger.

A list of his successes speaks for itself: thirteen times winner of the Azerbaijan Championship, victories and prizes in many international tournaments, and member of the winning USSR team in the European Championship. But this is not the main thing. Vladimir Bagirov, who played regularly in the championships of the Soviet Union, successfully competed with the representatives of the world chess elite, which was what those championships almost entirely consisted of.

There is no doubt that if, after his brilliant debut, the 23-year-old Bagirov had taken part in two or three international tournaments, he would soon have become a grandmaster. Sadly for him, the number of world-class grandmasters in the Soviet Union was so great, and the competition so fierce, that only the best of the best could take part in international tournaments.

Officially Bagirov became a grandmaster late in life, at the age of 42. 'When he phoned home, he was crying with happiness', recalls his widow Iraida Bagirova. 'At last I am a grandmaster! I am a grandmaster! he kept repeating.' It need hardly be said that the grandmaster title today, widespread and devalued as it is, does not bear any comparison

with the title that it once was and signified, in complete accordance with the meaning of the word, 'great master'!

Bagirov learned to play chess from the games of Rubinstein. The development of his style was considerably influenced by Vladimir Makogonov, a positional player of very high class. His idol in modern chess was Smyslov. It is not surprising, therefore, that Bagirov was a player with an academic, positional style. He possessed an excellent endgame technique, was highly erudite in the opening, and incredibly tenacious in defence. Like many classical and positional players, he had a weak point: he would lose his way in unbalanced, irrational positions. There his logically-trained thinking had nothing to rely on. But in 'his' positions Bagirov was a danger to anyone.

Viktor Kortchnoi describes Bagirov as a strong player with ideas: 'He did not play so much to win a game, points as such did not greatly interest him. He rather wanted to demonstrate his opening conception. He was absorbed by chess in the very best sense of the word.'

Boris Spassky remembers him as a distinctive player whose openings were his strongest sides: 'He handled the King's Indian with white very subtly, very subtly. At first sight he was a rather static player, but in fact he was very vigilant. After all you can't go far in chess on static play alone.'

A quarter of a century after Bagirov crossed the threshold of the Baku Pioneers' Palace, another boy arrived there, Garry Kasparov, who shared the following recollection: 'Bagirov was a strong grandmaster, very strong, with his own vision of chess. He was always number one in Azerbaijan, and the appearance of a boy who would push him into the background was psychologically very difficult to him, for his reputation, for his status. We played blitz quite often, but he avoided meeting me in serious competitions. Once in a team event such a meeting seemed unavoidable, but at the last moment Bagirov was replaced, and I had to play against Oleg Isaakovich Privorotsky, who was then my trainer. In my life I have twice conceded first board, when from all the indicators I should have been leading the team. Incidentally, perhaps this was why, in both cases, I did not play very well. The first time was in 1979, when Bagirov headed the Azerbaijan team in the Spartakiad. This was done on a formal basis, since I was then not a grandmaster.

The second time was when I conceded first board to Petrosian in 1982. On that occasion Tigran Vartanovich asked me: 'Garry, I should like for the last time in my life to play on board one.' Bagirov was one of the first who predicted that I would become World Champion. When in 1976 the participants in the USSR Championship were asked who would play a match with Karpov in 1984 for the World Championship, he named me, which provoked a furious reaction from the Soviet authorities.'

The openings that make up a grandmaster's repertoire should not only be close to him in style. He should also sense their every nuance, every subtlety. For Bagirov such openings were the Alekhine Defence, the Caro-Kann, and the Slav Defence. But in particular, the Alekhine Defence.

Smyslov remembers Bagirov describing how Alekhine himself once appeared before him in a dream and insistently recommended that he should study and regularly employ his opening.

Towards the end of his career Bagirov gave a more prosaic explanation: 'I remember how it all began. It was 1946. I happened to come across an issue of the magazine *Shakmaty v SSSR*, in which the experienced master Vldas Mikenas talked about the Alekhine Defence. The opening very much appealed to me. White appears to attack, and to cross the centre of the board, but then unexpectedly he 'overdoes things' and often he is not able to maintain his formidable bastions. I began working, but for many years I did not dare employ it. I did not then think that this 'non-serious' opening would become my favourite weapon against 1.e4 and that it would serve me faithfully all my life. I cannot say that it was without success. Often my opponents simply stopped opening the game with the king's pawn.'

Bagirov was the leading expert on this opening in the world. He played some five hundred games with the Alekhine Defence, and he wrote a monograph on this opening, which is still considered a classic.

Bagirov ascribes the story of how this book was written to the start of his literary activity. The taste for writing books on opening theory was imparted to him by the well-known master and theoretician Yakov Borisovich Estrin. When he was once in Moscow, Bagirov called in on

Estrin and saw in his study a shelf that was completely filled with various editions of a book written by the flat owner. In slight astonishment he saw *The Two Knights Defence* in Russian, German, Spanish, English and other languages. 'You are just like Lenin', said Bagirov, smiling. 'Why don't you have a try yourself, Volodya? Estrin encouraged him. Within a year the first edition of *The Alekhine Defence* appeared.

After it came another book, *The English Opening*, which was translated into many languages. These were very good books, written by an expert, intelligibly and with love. In writing them Bagirov used his own analyses, recorded in small handwriting in numerous notebooks, which he retained to the very last. The sources of this accuracy and diligence are to be found, as he told me, in his Baku childhood: 'In the years when I was taking my first steps in the game, there was practically no chess literature. Now it is hard to imagine, but, for example, when I was a second category player, over a period of several days I simply copied out Rabinovich's *The Endgame* by hand.'

On one occasion I was present at a discussion between the two leading experts on the Alekhine Defence, Bagirov and Alburt. When we parted Bagirov presented me with a copy of his book, in which he wrote: 'With best wishes for mastering this difficult opening.' I said to him: 'At my age you can't master new openings anymore. You have to be happy if you don't forget the ones you usually play.' 'Excuse me', replied Volodya, 'but a new opening can be learned at any age, if there is the right desire.' At that time he was fifty years old.

Bagirov was in love with the Alekhine Defence, and several times, whether jokingly or seriously, he said that on his gravestone there should be depicted a chess board with a knight, symbolising his favourite opening.

As an epigraph to an article timed to coincide with his own fiftieth birthday, Bagirov chose the words of Seneca: *Docendo discimus*, by teaching, we ourselves learn. The epigraph was carefully chosen. Over a period of many years Bagirov worked with Polugaevsky and Tal, players who were superior to him in strength. This difference was not felt during their preparations. The sufferings and emotions which filled Bagirov when playing, retreated into the background when he was analysing and his best qualities, deep positional understanding and his skill

to penetrate in the secrets of a position, combined with his obliging nature and devotion, made him an ideal second and helper.

For nine years Bagirov worked with Lev Polugaevsky. These were the years when Polugaevsky was a key player in the battle for the World Championship. When Polugaevsky died, Bagirov said: 'He was a grandiose player. For both the fact that I am a grandmaster, and also for my achievements in chess, I am much indebted to Lev Polugaevsky.' The fact that for a prolonged period Polugaevsky was one of the best-prepared grandmasters in the world was to no little degree thanks to Vladimir Bagirov.

The Interzonal tournament in Subotica in 1987, when he was Tal's second and I was Albur's, was a long event, with free days and days for adjournments. Almost every day Bagirov and I went to the swimming pool, which was not far away, and once we even completed a lengthy hike around a lake. Bagirov was a man who drew attention with his exotic appearance. A very tall, large, Eastern type of man, with a beard and moustache, who also possessed an impressive bass voice. He once told me that when he was working as an engineer, they intended to make him shop foreman. Such a man with such a voice would be able to keep the workers in hand!

Tal had a sceptical attitude to our walks. Misha's attitude could be most correctly expressed by the words: 'Nature? Is that where chickens run about, before they are plucked?' Bagirov did not abandon his unsuccessful attempts to entice Tal to go bathing. After exhausting them all, he employed his last, and, as it seemed to him, strongest argument: 'You know, Misha, it isn't just any old pool, there are sulphur springs there. It has been shown that they are very good for your health.' 'Ah, sulphur', Misha replied as quick as a flash. 'Well, as far as I'm concerned, hell can wait for awhile.'

During our walks we discussed various things. It was the summer of 1987 and underground tremors in the Soviet Union were already being felt. We often talked about politics, and sometimes about sport, but the main topic of conversation was chess.

At the end of his life, in which a considerable amount of time had been devoted to literary work, he was to say: 'Usually, when you are writing, it has an adverse effect on your results, since it keeps you from

studying chess 24 hours a day.' In these words there are hints of regret. Indeed, it is not possible.

Bagirov was captivated by chess, unreservedly and for ever, but not as happens with strong and short-term passions, which are known to everyone. Playing in tournaments was only one of the components of this captivation. He also liked both to play blitz and to analyse. To no less a degree he loved that chess atmosphere which is invariably found at competitions and training sessions, and in tournament lobbies. He breathed this chess air as a boy on Seaside Boulevard in Baku, and this air remained in his lungs all his life. He loved this small talk, the counting of points, the tie-breaking procedures, the chances of qualifying for the next stage of a competition, or the analysis without a board over dinner of a game just played. 'What, pawn to a4? How do you mean? Or do pawns no longer count here?' 'What does a pawn matter here, your bishop is shut in.' 'Bishop? What about the fact that your old man is cut off on the c-file – are you with me?' – dialogues that made a strange impression on people who didn't understand chess. I might add: a discussion of the game just finished between Karpov and Kasparov, bets on the outcome of their next game, bets on the outcome of the World Championship match as a whole, a suggestion to play cards after dinner, a discussion of yesterday's match between Juventus and Ajax, as Bagirov was also a great lover of football, and numerous other things. An honourable place in this endless list is occupied by his love for telling chess anecdotes.

Bagirov was involved in professional chess in the Soviet Union from the late fifties, and was not only an onlooker and a competitor, but also an expert on this enormous departed world. Apart from being very observant, he was also an excellent storyteller. Many of his stories have been erased from my memory. When conversing with him it did not occur to me to make any jottings 'just in case', a habit which is more onerous than pleasant. But I vividly remember one story which he acted out with great mastery.

He and Lev Aronin, one of the strongest masters in the country at that time, were playing in a tournament and they agreed a draw before the start of the game. Aronin was White. In the words of Bagirov: 'I played carelessly, spending hardly any time, whereas Aronin thought

for a long time over every move. When we emerged from the opening, it was a Queen's Gambit, I noticed that my position was markedly inferior. If we played on much more, it would be inconvenient to agree a draw. After all, the spectators were quite knowledgeable. Deciding that the moment had come, I suggested to my opponent that we agree a draw. Aronin raised his head, and I met the glance of his kind, beautiful eyes.' Here Bagirov made an expressive pause and looked at his companion through his large, horn-rimmed glasses. 'You know, Volodya', replied Aronin, 'I should like to play on. It seems to be that my position is slightly more pleasant.'

In 1979, after Lev Alburt had asked for political asylum in Germany, the Burevestnik team was met directly at the aeroplane steps by Viktor Baturinsky, at that time the head of Soviet chess. First out of the plane was Bagirov. 'Volodya, where were you looking, how could you allow this, Volodya...' 'Viktor Davidovich, why are you so angry; there are some musicians flying with us, and nearly half of them have stayed behind, whereas we have an excellent percentage of returners', said Bagirov, trying to justify himself and spreading his hands.

In 1980 Bagirov moved from Baku to Riga, which implied moving from one republic of the Soviet Union to another. Although he lived in Latvia for the last twenty years of his life, Bagirov remained largely a person of the East. He knew very well what was meant by power, the authorities, and he was rather afraid of them, but he also knew all the answers.

He had the reputation of being a pessimist and a sceptic. In the eyes of many, Bagirov was also a moaner, and a grumbler. It seems to me that this is not altogether correct. It was more that he played the role of a person from a fairy tale, who is eternally unlucky, who always expects the worst, and if this worst happens, exclaims: 'There, what did I say!'

At an All-Union club competition in Moscow, members of the Burevestnik team are crowded round the ladies' board. Time trouble. The young player representing the student society twice overlooks a simple combination, leading to the loss of a rook. Her opponent, who is also short of time, repeats moves, missing this opportunity. There is a sigh of relief. Time trouble has come to an end and the danger has

passed. Bagirov says to his team colleagues: 'It's too early for you to be celebrating. She still has to seal a move.' The move sealed for the third time allowed the capture of the rook, and the game, of course, was resigned without being resumed.

At the tournament in Yurmala in 1987, Yuri Razuvaev employed against Bagirov an important new move in the Meran Variation. Black's position immediately became critical. Razuvaev recalls: 'Bagirov sat looking completely crushed. Of course, he immediately understood everything. For a whole hour Volodya sat shaking his head, not making a move, and looking at the position and clearly muttering to himself: 'Well, of course, this was specially prepared for me, who else... He has probably been keeping it up his sleeve for years, and now he has used it, having found a suitable opponent... Not against anyone else, but against Bagirov – that is clear.' But he was also very pleased when in the end he drew the game.'

It is typical that fate often listens to people with this type of character, leaving them with an inferior tie-break score when there is a share of places, deciding the qualification to the next stage of a competition, or, for example, arranging each time to leave them half a point short of achieving the grandmaster norm. 'This was bound to happen', Bagirov would often repeat. And indeed, an improbable set of results in the last round would swing the table in such a way as to deny him even an insignificant prize.

During the drawing of lots for the final stage of the USSR Cup, in Dnepropetrovsk in 1970, Bagirov, who had a wide choice of less famous opponents, drew Tal. He showed his card to the spectators and sadly shook his head with an appearance which said: This is no surprise. I didn't expect anything else!

The rumours that, in the train in which he usually travelled to Germany, something unpleasant had happened, were confirmed. The victim of a nighttime robbery, despite all the precautionary measures taken, was, of course, Bagirov.

For the minimum age, giving him the right to play in his first World Senior Championship, he was two weeks short. 'Just imagine, all of two weeks! What would it have cost me to be in a bit of a hurry sixty years ago!' Bagirov grieved, and in his voice could be heard the vexa-

tion of a child, suffering from the fact that he had not yet reached the age necessary for watching adult films.

I think, nevertheless, that both Bagirov's scepticism, and his pessimism, rested on a basis of healthy optimism. At times it seemed to me that he gave vent to his complaints only so as not to tempt fortune. Superstition was a more appropriate explanation for his gloomy predictions.

He used to remark on good fortune in others. 'Yes it was a beautiful goal that your Van Basten scored, it goes without saying. But give him a hundred chances to shoot from the same position, I am ready to bet, and he wouldn't score. He was lucky!' said Bagirov, talking about the goal scored by the Dutch striker against the Soviet Union in the European Championship Final in 1988. The echo, you see, others are lucky, is also heard here. I think, even so, that in the depths of his soul he believed in luck, in final success. Without such a belief it is impossible to play chess at a professional level, and to play as he did.

All the vexations and injustices, real or apparent, Volodya stored up inside him, but sometimes they would burst out, and some long-harbour'd resentment would escape. 'Excuse me', Bagirov would then say, after which was expressed a thought that he had been enduring, or which for a long time had not given him peace, and this 'Excuse me', repeated as a refrain during his monologue, had the function of the English 'Dear...' in a letter, after which one can express what one wants and in whatever terms. In recent times these outbursts also occurred during competitions, and his stentorian bass voice would be heard in all corners of the tournament hall. Young people, who knew him from open tournaments, could have gained the impression that they were dealing with a scandalmonger or troublemaker.

Iraida Bagirova says: 'He was a Caucasian man, he spoke loudly, although he himself did not notice this, and he could flare up, quickly lose his temper, and say god knows what, but he did not bear any grudges. Later he would be ashamed and ask for forgiveness. He was forgiving, unmalicious, and he was forgiven for everything, because he was kind. And he was very obliging. During all of the 37 years that we lived together, he was never even as much as a quarter of an hour late.'

He often remembered his wife. Last summer, sitting in the small

garden of my house, he sighed: 'You have a very nice place. It is a pity only that my Ira is not here. You don't know, but she would immediately say what this plant is called, and that one.'

After his death Iraida Bagirova said to me: 'He could tell me that he loved me, me, an old woman. But now, when he is no longer here, I want to tell him that I love him, because I never did this, and now it is not possible.'

After Bagirov moved to Riga, practically all of the Latvian players passed through his hands: Vitolins, Lanka, Shabalov, who was then living in Latvia, and Shirov.

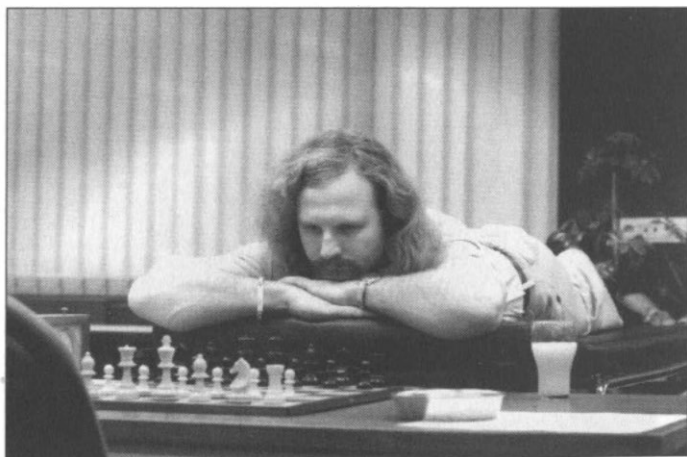
Alexey Shirov remembers: 'Vladimir Konstantinovich Bagirov was my trainer for several years in the period from 1986 to 1989. When we travelled somewhere we always stayed in the same hotel room. It was like that in Moscow, when Piket and I studied with Botvinnik, also at the World Cadet Championship, and it was also like that at other tournaments. Then I began working with Lanka, and my teacher-pupil relationship with Bagirov changed more to one of being colleagues, but relations between us always remained very good. He was a brilliant analyst and had a remarkable understanding of the game. Bagirov's evaluation in analysis as it were drew the line – his was the last word.'

In his last years he acquired a new refrain: 'Whom does this interest now?', which he would rhetorically ask in reply to my questions if they seemed to him naïve or absurd. 'Think what you are saying. What services to Latvian chess players are we taking about? Whom does this interest now? If Koblenz, who was both born in Riga and spoke Latvian, could be thrown out of the Federation, what services can I have given?'

We often spoke on the telephone. Bagirov regularly wrote theoretical articles for *New In Chess Yearbook*, and the standard of these articles was always very high. We met at Olympiads, but more often at my house in Amsterdam, when he would call in after the finish of some open tournament in Holland. In the old times, when travelling abroad, the practised eye of the customs officer would almost always pull him out of the crowd, and he would go off to be examined, casting a glance at his fellow chess players, freely leaving the hall of the airport: 'I didn't expect anything else...' Now he travelled around Europe exclusively by



Tony Miles (glass of milk in hand!) playing Jan Timman at the 1978 Zonal Tournament in Amsterdam.



Tilburg 1985: 'I arrived at the tournament hall to find my chair replaced by a full sized massage table.'



Viktor Kortchnoi and his then trainer Genna Sosonko in Riga in 1970.



With Petra Leeuwerik at the Candidates' match against Boris Spassky in Belgrade in 1977.



A passion for endless analysis. In the press room in Wijk aan Zee in 1992 together with (l. to r.) a very young Peter Leko, Vladimir Tukmakov and Jeroen Piket.



Vladimir Bagirov



Mikhail Tal and Vladimir Bagirov before one of their over-the-board encounters. Soviet Cup Tournament, Dnepropetrovsk 1970.



Hilversum 1988. Bagirov and Sosonko in discussion during the post-mortem of the match Timman-Tal.

train or bus. It had become expensive to fly. He once said: 'I have already forgotten the way to the airport; I don't remember when I last flew.'

I would usually meet Volodya at the station and would immediately spot him. It was hard not to. Even in the exotic maelstrom of Amsterdam his appearance stood out. He had put on weight and gone grey, but he had retained his imposing bearing. He now resembled some Indian guru, or, when he had had his hair cut short, he looked like Sean Connery in one of his later roles.

Otherwise Bagirov looked like any ordinary participant in open chess tournaments. He would be dressed according to the season, tracksuit top and trainers, at cold times of the year a cap on his head, and in his hands a large sports bag. Apart from the usual things, in it could be found everything necessary for the wandering chess player: a heater for preparing tea or coffee, a portable computer, a few notebooks crammed with opening variations and analyses, a magnetic chess set made in Riga, an invariable companion on all his travels, several packets of Latvian cigarettes, and a large plastic water bottle. He had acquired the computer only in later years, but, like nearly all players of the older generation, he regarded it sceptically, and used it only as a database. In a special folder he kept the addresses and telephone numbers of tournament organisers in Germany, Holland and Scandinavia, and telephone cards from various countries in the world. He knew where he could count on a free night's stay in a double hotel room, the usual accommodation conditions for a grandmaster of his rating, and where he would be a guest in the house of some local player. The complicated routes of trains and buses and the times of changes, including the final nighttime one in Warsaw, he knew by heart. The meaning of the expression 'Travelling is the school of scepticism' was familiar to him not only in its philosophical meaning.

He played in the German Bundesliga and was constantly worried that they would not renew his contract. The contract was important to obtain a permanent visa. His passport, that of a second-class citizen of the Latvian Republic, did not look too reliable. His pension in Riga was paltry, and these games for the Berlin club were very important for him. Winning the World Senior Championship in 1998 brought Bagi-

rov not only moral satisfaction: the prize, although nothing special, was more than two years of his pension.

Apart from that, he regularly participated in competitions that are well-known to every professional. Vladimir Konstantinovich Bagirov was one of the army of players in open tournaments. The most common formula of these tournaments is nine successive rounds without any free days. Six points leave you without a prize, six and a half, normally with a very small one, and seven – it all depends. A better result is not guaranteed even to a very strong grandmaster. For victory in such a tournament one needs luck. Luck, or a mutually satisfying commercial agreement with a colleague before the game from the last round.

There are also tournaments lasting seven or eleven rounds, and sometimes two games are played in one day. Bagirov used to prepare for each game, he could not do otherwise. If time permitted – for several hours.

In halls, where there are simultaneously dozens, or even hundreds of games in progress, one occasionally notices grey or bald heads, inclined over the board, and wrinkled faces. These are grandmasters and masters whose successes were in the distant past. Sentenced now to the rough and tumble of open tournaments, they, who all their lives have been chess professionals, have the appearance of rare plants. Losing their playing strength with age, these professional players, like ageing elephants, are often forced to drag after them the tusks of their former talents and successes of youth. The tension, withstood with difficulty by the young, for older players may become fatal. Early in the year, during a game in an open tournament in Berlin, a contemporary of Bagirov, Aivar Gipslis, suffered a heart attack and died two months later without regaining consciousness. A native of Riga, for many years the second player in Latvia after Tal, Gipslis, like Bagirov, gained numerous good results in USSR Championships and international tournaments. And like Bagirov, he was well acquainted in his later years with both changing trains in Warsaw and Berlin, and the routes of night buses, and the cruel laws of open tournaments.

At the age of twenty, changing trains at night in Warsaw may seem a romantic adventure, and play in an open tournament in Germany may seem like one of the steps to a radiant future, to Linares or Frankfurt. But, as for other grandmasters of the older generation, Bagirov's future

was his brilliant past. They came into chess at a time when the standard of Soviet chess was extraordinarily high. But that is not all. Its reputation was also high. The title of international chess master sounded no worse than that of a prizewinner at an international violin competition. Chess players also performed in crowded concert halls. International grandmasters were like gods. The disappearance of this world coincided with the onset of the age which for a player is considered critical, and brought them, and Bagirov in particular, enormous disillusionment and was the ruin of their lives' foundations.

In the chess world at the start of the 21st century it is good to be a big elephant, a professional of Wijk aan Zee, Linares and Frankfurt. They are big, there are few of them, and things are fine for them. It is also good to be a little mouse, an amateur, playing for pleasure in the evening in the club, or one of the rapidly multiplying mice of the Internet. There are many of them, they do not depend on anyone, and things are fine for them. Things are bad for the little elephants and the large mice of open tournaments, engaging in the most difficult and thankless work in present-day professional chess.

Young players, who see the entire world in the light of their current rating, regard old men as easy booty. The prescription for playing them is well-known. A sharp opening serve, a constant maintaining of the tension, pushing them back to the base line by calculating play, and if this does not work, there is always the fifth set. These are the laws of sport, the one who wins is the strongest, whatever is understood by these words. Chess is not the theatre, and an elderly player, remaining on the stage, must be prepared to switch to the role of an extra, enjoying rare, episodic successes and dealing with other extras and famous actors who have never seen him in the leading roles.

This problem is not the only one. Often a professional player is obliged to combine playing with a mixture of occupations. Journalism, training, commentating, or organising work normally pays better than just playing chess. W.H. Auden's words: 'It is sad to realise that in our time a poet can earn much more by discussing his art, than by doing it' apply to chess to no less an extent.

In May he had to have an operation on his heart. 'How come you are thinking about chess?' said the doctors, 'the situation is more serious

than you think.' A few days before the operation we were speaking on the telephone. 'You are joking about it', said Volodya, 'but the operation is a very serious one. It could be that soon you'll have to put your pen to paper.'

The operation was a success. Within two weeks he left hospital and immediately began preparing for a trip to an open tournament in Germany. On this occasion his family managed to persuade him not to go.

He was making plans: 'In September in Poland there is the World Senior Championship, and I must be in good form.' He decided to play in an open tournament in Finland. The doctors were against it. They advised him to avoid stress for six months, but he kept pestering them: 'Well, when will I be able to play?' He used to explain to his family: 'You must understand, I can't manage without chess. Without chess, there is no reason for me to live...'

I was talking to him a week before he set off to the last tournament in his life. When I asked him to write about a topical variation of the Slav Defence for *New In Chess Yearbook*, he immediately agreed: 'Of course I'll do it.' After I had suggested a topic for another article, he began thinking, and there was a pause. 'You know', he said finally, 'this I can't do. On this line I don't want to write the whole truth, you know, and if I don't...'

We were talking about the move 1.b3, which he had employed quite often in recent times. It was with this move that he began both of his last games in which he had the white pieces.

Says Alexey Shirov: 'I saw Bagirov a few days before he died. We met in Riga, at the chess club, or more correctly, that which remains there of the chess club. He was not yet fully recovered after his operation, but at the board he was simply splendid. To be honest, I was even ashamed of myself. I did not see even a tenth of what Vladimir Konstantinovich saw...'

He won both games on the first day of the tournament. On the morning of the next day he also won the third. In the game from the fourth round both players ended up in time trouble and after the 36th move stopped recording their moves. The time scramble finished, and they began restoring the score. It turned out that the required number of

moves had been made. Bagirov was winning easily. Suddenly he turned red and began slowly sliding off his chair. A massive heart attack. An ambulance. Hospital. Two hours later Vladimir Konstantinovich Bagirov died, without regaining consciousness.

August 2000

Luka

Anatoly Lutikov 1933-1989

He played a number of games with Fischer and had a positive score against him. True, these were blitz games, and Bobby was only fifteen years old. They met in Moscow, at the Central Chess club, in the summer of 1958. The name of Fischer's opponent was Anatoly Lutikov.

Fischer had just won the United States Championship and now, together with his sister Joan, he had come to the capital of world chess. In the mornings his sister went off to the museums, but museums were of little interest to Bobby: for days on end he played chess. Bobby arrived at the club on Gogol Boulevard when there was no one yet there apart from the porter. Gradually the staff began to assemble: teachers, trainers, and the director himself – all of master strength. Fischer crushed them mercilessly. Vladimir Alatortsev also happened to turn up. They began ringing round the players with higher titles. Salo Flohr later remembered that a telephone call raised him from his bed: get up, Salomon Mikhailovich, your country needs you! Finally, they summoned the heavy artillery – Tigran Petrosian and young, strong and trained professionals, who in addition were experts at lighting play – Evgeny Vasiukov and Anatoly Lutikov. It was then that this match, a memorable one for Lutikov, took place.

He later recalled that they played about thirty games, of which he won roughly two thirds. Fischer, with his child-like ingenuousness, was upset by his failure, and once, when in the heat of the battle Lutikov resigned in a won position, he was unable to conceal his joy.

A few months later, at the Interzonal tournament in the Yugoslav town of Portoroz, Bobby Fischer finished among the winners and earned the right to play in the Candidates' tournament. At the age of fifteen he became the youngest grandmaster in the world, whereas his opponent in the Moscow blitz match had to wait fifteen long years before he received this title.

Lutikov was led into chess accidentally. Leningrad. 1946. A lecture in the Palace of Culture. The topic: a new, miraculous drug – penicillin.

But there was some time before the lecture began and, together with a friend, the boy from the working-class district went into the chess room. He was not yet thirteen. Lutikov saw the concentrating faces of people, moving wooden pieces on a board. For Tolya it was all very strange: he didn't know how to play. A friend quickly began teaching him. They remembered about the lecture only when the chess room was closing...

His first chess book was the self-tutor by Schiffers. There was little about the openings in that book. Thus about the reply 1...c6 to the opening move of the king's pawn, it stated briefly: irregular opening. But there was a good selection of games: several hundred of them, and all sharp, combinative battles. This book certainly influenced the young Lutikov and in the end defined his style.

Tolya Lutikov should have begun to gain a grasp of chess theory in the Leningrad Pioneers' Palace. But with his independent character, recklessness, and his entire manner of behaviour, he somehow did not fit in with the academic regime of tournaments on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and theoretical lessons on Fridays. His sole trainer became play itself. He played when he wanted and where he wanted. In the Chigorin Club, in the Houses of Culture, in the summer in gardens and parks. Tournament and training games, the analysis of them, the study of opening variations, blindfold play, play with two moves in a row, or three, and, of course, blitz.

Blitz! Classical five-minute blitz where the winner stays on, three minutes or even a minute each for a game, two players against two, making moves alternatively – the formula could be very varied. And always accompanied by noise and laughter, by expressions and catch-phrases, in which chess terms were so interlaced with urban folklore, that a person unfamiliar with this world would simply not understand what was being said. He watched the games of the strongest Leningrad players of that time, catching their every expression, word or joke. With admiring eyes Tolya looked at Alexander Kazimirykh Tolush, when the latter, opening his pack of 'Kazbek', lit up another cigarette and, leaning across to his opponent as he landed a tactical blow, would sympathetically ask him: 'You don't mind, do you?' Or, not concerning himself with the loss of a pawn, would declare to his opponent, who in the end would find himself in a lost position: 'Amen

to your pies!’ Or simply keep up his spirits with his standard ‘Forward, Kazimirych!.’ Many expressions, used by the adult Anatoly Lutikov, came from that distant Leningrad childhood.

In 1949 Tolya Lutikov was one of the members of the Leningrad Junior Team that became national champions. What a team that was! It was headed by Kortchnoi, and it included the twelve-year-old first category player Borya Spassky, together with Vladimir Lyavdansky and Alexander Geller, who were later to become masters. The team’s trainers were Vladimir Zak and Lutikov’s idol, Alexander Tolush.

Chess battles on long Leningrad evenings were often shared by Lutikov with the young candidate masters Vitya Kortchnoi, Kolya Krogius and Borya Vladimirov. They smoked like chimneys, there was no end to the jokes, the endless time ticked away on both faces of the chess clocks, as evening imperceptibly changed into night, and all their lives still lay ahead.

These evenings, these chess vigils, and finally, tournament play itself, were the chess university of Anatoly Lutikov. Opening theory was something that he mainly studied directly during tournaments. He had no notebooks with secret analyses of the Dragon, or the subtleties of the minority attack in the Queen’s Gambit. On the other hand, he carefully preserved one – with the accurately recorded games of Alekhine.

In 1950 in the championship of the city, along with the well-known masters Taimanov, Furman, Klamann, Kopylov and Zhukovitsky, two young players also took part – Kortchnoi, and the seventeen-year-old Lutikov, who had just become a candidate master. With his crew cut, ancient, worn-out jacket, and darned shirt with its protruding collar, he looked then like a worker from one of the Leningrad factories. Which, in fact, he was. He finished last in the tournament, but he conducted several games in ‘brilliant attacking style with sacrifices’. These words were to become the label, the trademark of Lutikov throughout his chess career.

Twenty years later Lutikov was playing for a grandmaster team in a tournament in Sochi. It was opposed by a team made up of promising masters. The position of the young Borya Gulko, playing against Lutikov, was roughly equal, when, looking for winning chances, he

provoked his opponent into sacrificing a piece, which in fact turned out to be very dangerous. 'There is no need to tempt Lutikov into sacrificing material; he himself will always sacrifice something against you', remarked Kortchnoi, watching the game.

Lutikov himself characterised his style as follows: 'Attack is what I treasure most. By nature I am a tactician. Unfettered, open chess, giving pleasure to spectators, is what I have liked all my life. In my youth I spent a long time watching Tolush play. That was a spectacle! I regard him as one of my teachers. Chess should, and is simply obliged, to be attractive to spectators. And it can be, if it is not deadened by excessive pragmatism. I consider a tournament to be a success, irrespective of the result, if I am able to play several combinative games.'

He became a master, won the Russian Championship, and played in several USSR Championships. Lutikov was a strong player with his own vision of the game, with an excellent feeling for the initiative, but also with deficiencies, which he simply could not overcome right to the end: an inadequate mastery of positional technique, technical errors in the endgame, and a poorly developed opening repertoire for Black. As often happens with players of a tactical bent, his results with White were much better: playing for academic equality was not to his taste, and playing to seize the initiative with black right from the opening can have serious consequences. And one more thing. He was not accustomed to working independently, but he needed a vis-à-vis, a workmate, to whom when discussing the evaluation of a position on the board, he could briefly say: 'Make a move.'

It cannot be said, however, that Lutikov did not study chess at all. His opening repertoire became more balanced. He stopped playing the King's Gambit – the favourite weapon of his youth – but he remained tactically inclined, if possible right from the opening. Often he would bring out his queen's knight on the very first move in reply to 1.e4, and it was he who introduced in the late 1960s the exotic variation 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 ♘c6. But also in the Ruy Lopez he had a leaning towards secondary variations, and thus he often employed the line 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 d6 5.c3 f5.

Early in 1978 at a tournament in Minsk he played a dubious opening set-up against a fourteen-year-old lad from Baku – the future winner of

the tournament. Although Lutikov resisted for a long time, he was unable to avoid defeat. This game, a memorable one for Kasparov, was the first that he won against a grandmaster 'one to one', as he described it in *The Test of Time*.

Some think that if Lutikov had studied chess diligently, learned the classics, and played solid set-ups, his talent would have shone even more vividly and he would have achieved much more. I am not sure about that. He was one of those players, normally tacticians, who play with some kind of inner animal instinct. After a brilliantly conducted attack he would find it hard to explain why he had played thus, and not otherwise: his hand itself had reached out for the right piece. Attempts to change a playing manner formed in your youth, and to change your style at the expense of acquired knowledge, can have only adverse consequences: the unique thing given from nature deteriorates, while you acquire that which many are able to do. It is symptomatic that chronometry, which became fashionable in the 1970s, did not work for Lutikov: recording the time spent on thinking merely diverted him from the game.

Lutikov's first international tournament brought him nothing but grief. It is true that the Moscow tournament of 1959 was very strong. First place in it was shared by Bronstein, Smyslov and Spassky. But the names of the other participants were also impressive: Olafsson, Filip, Portisch, Larsen, Simagin, Aronin, Vasiukov... Lutikov conducted all his games in his usual reckless manner, and, as in his first Leningrad Championship, finished last. This was to happen to him on more than one occasion. It was the price for his 'all or nothing' attitude. Lutikov did not despair and did not change his style. That same year he won the Championship of the Russian Republic, and the next year a tournament in East Germany, in Bad Salzungen. But for the title of international master he had to wait another seven years.

In the tournament in the Dutch town of Beverwijk in 1967, by tradition there were many of the world's leading players such as Szabo, Larsen, Darga, Donner, Gligoric and Kavalek. The tournament was won by Spassky, while Lutikov took second place, only half a point behind the winner, and without losing a single game. This was his finest hour. According to Spassky, there Lutikov played with composure and with

full responsibility, more than at any time in his life. Although this was a grandmaster result, the following year in Amsterdam Lutikov played only in the master group of the IBM tournament: there were too many top-class players then in the Soviet Union, and too many were contending for a place in the grandmaster tournament.

During tournaments in Holland, Lutikov could often be seen in the company of the Dutch master Dick van Geet, a player with an original style, who championed the opening which in fact became known as the Van Geet Opening: 1. ♖c3. The unusual positions which they analysed obviously appealed to them both, and although Lutikov's German was largely limited to the terms 'besser' and 'nicht gut', they understood each other perfectly well.

Lutikov became an international grandmaster only at the age of forty, after sharing first place with Hort in a tournament in Leipzig in 1973, but four years before that he finished third in the USSR Championship in Alma Ata, ahead of many well-known grandmasters, for which he received the title of national grandmaster – an achievement attained by very few.

His line in chess was to some extent a continuation of Chigorin's line, who wrote: 'Mr Tarrasch prefers defence, but we, with our inherent weakness, aim for attack.' And, like Chigorin, enamoured with attack, he experienced difficulties after the initial move 1.d4. With his love of blitz, his reliance on the playing aspect of chess, with his disregard for the competitive regime, he in no way subscribed to the Botvinnik form of chess, on the coat of arms of which was engraved: success goes to those who are well prepared. He was a self-taught, naturally gifted player, and his line in the diversity of Soviet chess was the line of masters and grandmasters of various strengths and degrees of talent such as Shamaev, Shishkin, Antoshin, Kholmov, Chaplinsky, Vyzhmanavin or Arbakov.

Tournaments, tournaments, tournaments. City championships and army events, team championships and championships of sports societies. Spartakiads and championships of republics, sometimes – if you were sent – international tournaments, and, of course, semifinals and finals of the USSR Championship, the strongest tournaments in the

world at that time. The tournaments would last for a week, two, three, sometimes even a month. Life on wheels.

Cities, cities, cities. One would need a very detailed atlas of the Soviet Union, in order to record all the places where Lutikov played.

Solid, broad-boned, with a simple, peasant-like face, and his hair combed back – that was how Lutikov looked at that time. And the bow tie, which he often wore during tournaments, merely contrasted with his entire appearance.

He had a nickname – Luka. He owed it not so much to the similar sound to his surname, so much as to the hero of the frivolous poem by Barkov, which he frequently remembered, and which he often recited with pleasure.

Colleagues, friends, drinking companions. Lengthy drinking sessions. Merriment, exchanges of views, and conversations, the content of which it was impossible to remember on the following murky morning. He possessed a rare constitution, and in his younger days he could calmly down a litre of vodka in an evening, or perhaps even more. In such a state he would become heavy, and the evening could end anywhere and at any unearthly hour. An extract from the militia records of those years. 'Citizen A.S. Lutikov in a state of extreme alcoholic intoxication was found dragging on his back another citizen, who later was found to be M.N. Tal.'

Once at the closing banquet of a tournament he made a speech to those present, which began: 'Ladies and Hamiltons!' And at the USSR Championship in Moscow in 1969 he had a scuffle with Leonid Stein. Both had had more than a drop too much, when at the summons of the floor attendant the militia arrived. Stein was especially violent, attacking one of the custodians of law and order and even tearing his shirt off him. When the militia men finally tried to tie up Stein with a rope, Lutikov, observing the process from the side, efficiently advised the senior officer, while making the appropriate gestures: 'That's no way to tie him up, this is how you should do it.'

The militia also had to be summoned in Sverdlovsk, when Lutikov was playing in a USSR Championship semifinal. One night, the floor attendant, on seeing in the hotel corridor a completely naked man, short-sightedly trying to find the door to his room, from where his card-playing friends had ejected him, decided that it was an apparition

and became frightened to death. When the militia man arrived, he saw an idyllic scene: Lutikov, in suit and tie, trying not to breathe, sitting at the chess board searching for the best continuation...

On another occasion, in Novosibirsk, a joker who made some caustic remarks, discovered that the 'intellectual with spectacles' also possessed considerable physical strength.

These stories, which were already impressive, acquired all kinds of details, making chess folklore and creating a colourful image of Anatoly Lutikov. However, he himself stated that he kept it all under control: 'I always know how much I drank the previous evening', Lutikov asserted. 'Once in my youth, getting out of bed in the morning, I trod on my glasses. Since then, before going to bed, I always put my glasses under the bed, and the more I drink the previous evening, the further under the bed I put my glasses.'

Much was forgiven, and to much they turned a blind eye, since they knew that in the evening that same person would breathe life into the wooden pieces, as only he could.

Although he went abroad several times, the world beyond the Soviet Union remained for him foreign, an overseas fairy tale, and he was what he was – a citizen of the country where he was born and lived all his life. Spassky remembers how in 1967 in Moscow, Lutikov visited him: 'After two or three glasses I told a couple of anecdotes about Vasily Ivanovich Chapaev, which were then in fashion. Suddenly Tolya exerted himself: 'In my presence I would ask you not to tell such stories about heroes of the Civil War.'

The last period of his life was a difficult one. Deficiencies, camouflaged in youth by optimism and energy, become more evident in old age. In his case this occurred on the background of a severe, debilitating illness: the sugar content in his blood exceeded all permissible levels. He could no longer drink: his head would begin to swim after the first glass. He could no longer concentrate at the board, and his hand, which previously used to choose the required squares for his pieces, would now dispatch them into premature, cavalier attacks, easily parried by his opponents. Lutikov's attacks on the chess board began more to resemble ventures, the victim of which he became himself.

After a defeat he was not accustomed to sitting around, licking his wounds. 'I realise that after a defeat one should play with restraint. But all my good intentions immediately disappear when I sit down at the board and I involuntarily remember the previous day's failure', he himself admitted. The role of the opening increased still more, and this stage of the game was not his strong side, even in his best times. And increasingly in his words one heard vexation about the way life had turned out badly.

Besides, Lutikov simply did not have the means to exist: this is the fate awaiting many professional chess players who are not among the elite, irrespective of the country where they live. Society does not regard chess as a profession, and all the consequences for choosing it as such are borne by the player himself. Lutikov never received a stipend from the State. Several professions were listed in his service record: teacher, sports instructor, trainer, but effectively for all his life he was a chess professional. This was the only thing that he was able to do – play chess. The paradox was that, while being a chess professional, at the same time in his attitude to the game he remained a pure amateur, especially if one regards professionalism in sport through the definition, given by the dean of Soviet soccer, Andrey Starostin: an amateur squanders his earnings on drink, while a professional deposits them in the bank.

He always regarded himself as only a tournament player. When he was already past his best, he continued to hope: 'The life of a chess player does not end with one tournament, however interesting. He all the time has to think about new competitions, and prepare for new battles. Chess gives us competitive longevity, and I still hope to play in several big grandmaster tournaments.'

In search of better housing and living conditions, he journeyed thousands of kilometres across the once enormous country. Leningrad, Chelyabinsk, Novosibirsk, Tiraspol, Yaroslavl, Anapa, and again Tiraspol. These are the points where Anatoly Lutikov halted in his nomadic life. Each time he thought that in the new place everything would turn out right. The tournaments in which he took part became increasingly weak, just like his results in them.

In hungry, post-war Leningrad a fifteen-year-old boy used to dream: give me a pan of fried potatoes and I will beat anyone! He was not destined to climb to the very top in chess, but those who were able to do this knew very well that he, Anatoly Lutikov, was capable of winning against anyone. He became a grandmaster of chess, but in particular a grandmaster of attack. He smashed to pieces, and on more than one occasion, the positions of Tal and Kortchnoi, and he won against great players like Keres, Bronstein, Geller, Polugaevsky, Taimanov, Averbakh and Nezhmetdinov.

Anatoly Stepanovich Lutikov died in Tiraspol in 1989.

May 2002

The Reliable Past

On the occasion of Rafael Vaganian's 50th birthday

The early 1970's saw the emergence of a whole constellation of promising young chess players. It was a most extraordinary generation, that included Anatoly Karpov, Jan Timman, Ljubomir Ljubojevic, Ulf Andersson, Henrique Mecking, Zoltan Ribli, Gyula Sax, Andras Adorjan and Eugene Torre. And Armenia's favourite son Rafael Vaganian, who followed in the footsteps of his legendary compatriot Tigran Petrosian.

In the summer of 1969 a tournament was held in Leningrad to select the Soviet representative for the World Junior Championship. The best young players were invited to take part: Tolya Karpov, Rafik Vaganian, Sasha Beliavsky and Misha Steinberg, the exceptionally gifted boy from Kharkov who sadly died at an early age. Beliavsky declined the invitation, and it was decided that the remaining three would play six games each. The tournament turned out to be a long drawn-out business, and Rafik asked me to give him some help.

'How should I counter the Nimzo-Indian?' he asked as we began our preparations for one of the games against Karpov. From childhood this had been the future World Champion's favourite response to 1.d4. 'Go g3 on your fourth move', I suggested – even then I was inclined towards fianchettoing the king's bishop – 'it's not a bad move, and there's practically no theory here.' We looked at the various possibilities. 'How about if on 4...c5, instead of knight f3, I play 5.d5?' young Rafik suggested. I backed this idea – 'Why not, it's an unconventional move, you can be creative in your play.' His choice was made.

The venue for that strange match-tournament was the chess club of the Palace of Pioneers, which used to be Tsar Alexander III's study when it was still the Anichkov Palace. The games were played at a table beside an enormous window looking out over Nevsky Prospect. The children were all away on holiday, there were no spectators unless the player who was free that round wandered over to look. When I arrived the game had only just begun. After 1.d4 ♢f6 2.c4 e6 3.♢c3 ♠b4 4.g3 c5 5.d5 ♢e4 6.♣c2? Karpov went 6...♣f6 and Rafik looked at me

more in sorrow than in anger: White was on the verge of defeat, although in the end Vaganian managed to pull off a draw.

The tournament was won by Karpov, who went on to take the World Junior Championship and so launch his brilliant career. But his opponent's rise was also impressive. After winning in a strong field at an international tournament in Yugoslavia, Vaganian became a grandmaster at twenty, a rare achievement at that time.

By that time the young grandmaster's opening repertoire was already in place. The pirouetting movements of the knight, the most curious piece on the board, which takes us back to the game's Eastern origins, seem to me to offer the most favourable conditions for unexpected combinations, the greatest scope for the imagination. Vaganian is particularly fond of this piece and has played his knights marvelously since he was a child. It is therefore perhaps no coincidence that when he plays White, he often uses the Réti Opening, and when Black, he has often opted for the Alekhine Defence – both openings that bring the knight into play on the very first move.

But his chief defence against White's advance of the king's pawn has always been, and remains, the French. This comes of course from Petrosian and is characteristic of the whole Armenian school of chess: Lputian, Akopian and many others have all used the French Defence as their main weapon against the move 1.e4. This Eastern interlacing, these intricate patterns of pawns, especially in systems with a closed centre, evoke the architecture of the monasteries and churches hewn out of the Armenian mountains.

At the age of twenty Vaganian cut a striking figure. A visiting general at an army chess contest was once rendered speechless by the sight of Private Vaganian in foreign shoes and a purple jacket, his curly hair in a huge mop à la Angela Davis. Formally Rafik was doing his military service like anyone else, but I doubt if anyone ever saw him in fatigues.

For the next twenty years Vaganian's life was dominated by chess. He played constantly: team contests and Spartakiads, World Student Championships, Olympiads, European Championships and of course the championships of the USSR. He won more than thirty international tournaments. In 1985 he won the Interzonal tournament at Biel, leading the runner-up, Seirawan, by one and a half points. Immediately afterwards he shared first place at the Candidates' tournament at

Montpellier. He played Candidates' matches for the world title and belonged to the world chess elite. And it was not just a question of prizes and victories: his style of play itself was memorable, and many felt that his results, however impressive, did not reflect his enormous potential.

Colleagues of Vaganian who have played dozens of games with him – Boris Gulko, Vladimir Tukmakov, Yuri Razuvaev, Lev Albur – all describe him as an exceptional talent. Everything in chess came naturally to him and his technique was of the highest quality. If you replay his endgames, comparisons with Capablanca inevitably spring to mind. His play was notable for its harmony, his tactics in perfect tune with the development of the game as a whole. The chessboard awoke the composer in him, and what he created was somehow complete, like a study, so astonishing at times was his conception.

Artur Yusupov recalls how during one team competition he assessed the situation in an adjourned game with Vaganian as equal, and proposed a draw. Vaganian refused. Artur was surprised, went over the possibilities again in his head, then discussed the situation with his grandmaster teammates. They too were baffled: a draw seemed inevitable. And then suddenly, just before the game was resumed, it hit him – Vaganian's sealed move, subtle and cunning, demanded a defence of extreme precision and care.

Vaganian's playing was unrestrained, and on occasion he left himself overexposed and lost the game as a result. But he played himself and allowed others to play. He didn't care what other people thought, he didn't try to read their glance for an assessment of the position on the board, he saw and felt it as only he could. His health was excellent, he possessed all the qualities that define a great chess player: imagination, a very subtle understanding of position, brilliant technique. Nevertheless he never played a match for the world title, and indeed never even got very close.

Why? we may ask. If we don't look for an explanation in Plato's postulate that nothing in the world is worth any great effort, or subject to painstaking research Smyslov's proposition that the constellation of the stars did not favour Vaganian and it was simply not his destiny, then we need to look for the answer elsewhere.

His contemporary Anatoly Karpov, who has played numerous games

against him, suggests that Vaganian's career has been dogged by the fact that his play depends very much on his mood. In the right mood he can play; in the wrong mood, his game becomes flat. It is also true that Vaganian has sometimes lost games because he was unable to rein in the multitude of ideas in his head. Sometimes he became so distracted that he forgot one harsh truth: in chess, as in football, it's not the elegant feints and dribbling that count, it's the goals scored. Most of Vaganian's colleagues would concur that if he had spent a little more time on his chess, kept strictly to a training regime, even if it was just an hour a day, and if he had had a permanent trainer to work with him on his openings, like Karpov had Furman, and if he had had better luck... Well, you can't argue with that.

The more far-sighted suggest that Rafik, who in his youth was completely uncontrollable and led a totally reckless existence, needed not so much a trainer, as a person who would have just been with him all the time, like Bondarevsky with Spassky. If the Vaganian of today, with his accumulated wisdom and life experience, had been with his 25-year-old self, perhaps his outstanding natural gift would have had a chance to develop fully. And you have to agree with that as well.

But I think there is another, more important, reason. Vaganian lacked the obsessive desire to become not just one of the best, but the very best, to subordinate everything in life, if only for a time, to those little wooden figures, to try to take the final step, make the last ounce of effort. But that last ounce of effort would have meant giving up the life he had grown accustomed to living, a life that flowed like a wide river, not bounded by chess, tournaments and travel but filled with friends, long sessions at the dinner table often lasting far into the night, dates and parties, cards and dominoes, jokes and tricks, and everything else that goes into the unstoppable merry-go-round of existence. He was too fond of all the joys of life, or what is usually meant by that phrase, to trade them all in for immortality in the form of his photograph hung up for posterity amongst the apostles on the chess club wall.

Once in the First League of the USSR Championship, he was doomed to a long, passive defence while playing out an arduous endgame. After one of his moves he got up and went over to master Vladimir

Doroshkevich. 'Dora', he said, 'go and buy some wine and sandwiches, and don't forget a pack of cards: we'll go into the night.' He was resigned to the fact that his evening was totally lost, but the night still belonged to him.

He had inexhaustible reserves of strength and the carefree self-confidence of youth. And it seemed that it would go on forever. And he got away with it all – the sleepless nights, the constant partying; everything went his way, without any pondering over the meaning of life or self-analysis or self-programming, because youth itself is programmed for success. The proverb 'If Youth only knew, if Age only could' has always seemed to me nonsense. If Youth knew, it wouldn't be Youth, encumbered as it would be by reason, logic and common sense.

In his youth Vaganian played a great deal. In 1970 alone he played more than 120 games – a record for the time. Botvinnik, on hearing this, shook his head: the Patriarch recommended playing sixty games a year, and spending the rest of the time on preparation and analysis. In those days tournaments lasted two or three weeks, sometimes a month, and Vaganian would be away for home for long periods, but wherever he was, he always knew that home meant Yerevan.

He grew up in the East, and family and friends meant and still mean more, immeasurably more, to him than in the West, where families communicate through occasional telephone calls and postcards and meet up only for Christmas and birthdays. During the World Cup in Brussels in 1988 his younger brother, his only brother, died. When the organisers tactfully raised the question of whether he would continue to play his answer was firm and immediate. As I took him to the airport, he was inconsolable, and I realised then what his family and his home meant to him, what place they occupied in his scale of values.

From his first childhood successes, Vaganian's name was known to everyone in Armenia, a small country with so many tragic and often bloody pages in its history. In any country fame brings with it not only benefits, but also a certain responsibility. In Armenia the role of national hero, the focus of the pride and love of a whole nation, is doubly gratifying but also doubly onerous. In the mid-1950s, when Soviet chess players started travelling abroad more often, they would often be

met at their destination not only by the tournament organisers but by a group of people chanting just one word: Petrosian. This was the Armenian diaspora, scattered around the world, welcoming their pride and joy, their favourite. When Petrosian played the World Title match against Botvinnik, Armenians sprinkled the steps of the Estrada Theatre, where the competition was taking place, with earth brought from their holiest place, the Monastery of Etchmiadzin. And the day that he won the title became a national holiday in Armenia.

If Petrosian was the King of Armenia, Vaganian became its Crown Prince. It was all there: the rapturous welcome after each victory, the press and television interviews, the recognition on the street, the autograph signing, the congratulations of friends he had grown up with, the receptions and celebrations with the city fathers, the protracted dinners where the tables groaned with food and the famous Armenian brandy flowed like water. Grandmasters who travelled to Armenia at the time recall how if you happened to mention in conversation that you were a colleague or friend of Vaganian, you became an honoured guest and there was no question of your paying your bill in a restaurant or café. Not surprisingly, there was little time left for serious work on his chess.

Botvinnik once remarked that Vaganian played as though chess did not exist before he came along. There is a note of disapproval here at his reluctance to work, to study the heritage of the past, but also amazement at the spontaneous and dispassionate workings of his mind. This quality might explain the wit and originality that mark Vaganian's pronouncements on one or other aspect of the game. Once when comparing chess masters from two different schools of thought, he said that the difference between Réti and Nimzowitsch was that Réti was essentially an attacking player, whereas Nimzowitsch was a defender, and based his entire strategy on defence.

At tournaments he could often be seen with Lev Polugaevsky. In spite of the considerable difference in their ages, they were somehow drawn to one another, and made a colourful pair. Polugaevsky was the gloomy and anxious Pierrot to the exuberant joker Vaganian's Harlequin.

'Of course he didn't hear you', Vaganian reassured Polugaevsky at an overseas tournament after the latter had made a critical remark about

the leader of their delegation, only to find him standing in the corridor outside the room where the remark had been made. 'When he gets back to Moscow he'll send a report about me to you-know-who, and they'll never let me out of the country again!' sighed the desperate Polugaevsky. 'I tell you what, we need to carry out an experiment. I'll go out into the corridor, and you say something in a loud voice. I need to know for sure whether he heard me or not.' 'Polugaevsky is a moron!' shouted Vaganian in a voice that brought down the plaster from the ceiling. 'You know, I couldn't hear a thing, what a relief', blushed Lev as he entered the room, trying to avert his eyes...

Vaganian has lived most of his life in the Soviet Union. He had of course to take into account the norms and rules of that country, but his attitude to them was rather like that of Tal's: he acknowledged the rules of the game, but it all happened somewhere in the background, and had nothing to do with him. He simply regarded it as a given, and remained himself in any situation. Like many people at that time, his only daily contact with the country he lived in was reading the newspaper *Sovietky Sport*.

During the Olympiad in Buenos Aires in 1978, surreptitiously reading a book by Solzhenitsyn, he confined his comments, as he turned a page, to the laconic: 'Yes, it's a bit of a mess.' He had a very sane attitude to life and an acute perception of the motives, actions and aims of people in the Soviet State. Nothing ever surprised him, although of course neither he nor anyone else at the time could foresee that in thirteen years time this unshakeable State would simply cease to exist, that he would be living in a small town in Germany, that Misha Tal would be his neighbour and that little Armenia, after gaining its independence, would find itself mired in a whole heap of serious problems which have yet to find their solutions.

He is still living in Germany, near Cologne, with his wife and two children. This is his tenth season of playing for the Porz Club in the Bundesliga. That is his main, in fact his only regular competition. There are also games in the Dutch Team Championship, and the odd appearance elsewhere. He can't remember when he last played in a closed tournament. Like most grandmasters of the older generation he uses a computer only as a database. He doesn't study the game any more,

apart from keeping an eye on developments at current tournaments. He has nothing more to learn. 'The chess that we played just doesn't exist any more', he once said to Boris Gulko. Just as in his youth, he doesn't win games in the opening. And playing White doesn't often guarantee him an advantage. Nevertheless his results are steady: each season he scores about 80 per cent in his games for Porz, and the club's success is to a great extent down to him. And sometimes he still plays games of incredible style and skill. But not always. Not always. Only when he's in the mood and feels like playing. He still plays for Armenia in Olympiads, and enjoys spending time there: so many things connect him to Yerevan. His children speak Armenian, Russian and German, but Rafik himself prefers to stick to his two first languages – he never got his tongue round German, and makes no effort to learn it. His son plays chess, but not competitively. Vaganian and his wife (who is also a chess player, but has not played seriously for years) are not interested in encouraging or pushing the boy. 'These days it's no profession. In most cases it's just hard work, badly paid, and to spend your whole life doing it...' says Vaganian, and you can hear in his voice echoes of Lessing meeting a professional French horn player and wondering: 'How can you spend your whole life biting a bit of wood with holes in it?'

Vaganian knows only too well that even in the old days, fifty was the critical age for chess players, and that this is even more true today, in this age of total intensification of the game. He has long since begun the descent from his peak, but this brings its own pleasures. There is no hurry any more. You can stay in your comfortable hollow and watch the youngsters clawing their way to the top. When he talks about them, there is no note of envy in his voice: he has known the sweet taste of fame and has no delusions about it. He is relaxed talking about it, it doesn't bother him, perhaps because it's much more difficult to make way for a new generation when you are in your thirties than when you will soon be entering your sixth decade. The danger lying in wait for many people as they get older – the trap of taking on some kind of socially responsible role – is not one that threatens Vaganian.

He has a characteristic way of speaking with a rising intonation at the end of each phrase, as though he is annoyed with someone or is complaining about something. His voice is instantly recognizable. 'That's Vaganian', Timman once said to me as we approached the room

set aside for competitors at the Interpolis Tournament, and heard someone's laughter issuing from it. I also hear his voice as I recall fragments from the conversations we had about chess and about life.

'No, I never had one particular chess idol. Though I did have a model – Fischer. I knew all his games, I was in love with his playing. Like him I tried never to offer a draw, I always played to the bitter end. And Bronstein! What a player! And Kortchnoi at the height of his powers! And Geller! And Tal, of course, Misha and I were very close – he was just a genius. Look at the way he played. Maybe he knew a couple of types of positions better than his opponent, but he improvised as he played. It was a different game then. We knew a bit, we studied a bit, and then we improvised at the chessboard. Nowadays they play move by move, everything's checked by the computer, the game is often decided after thirty moves. And then there is the terror of the ratings, that they make such a fetish of. I know it sounds like nostalgia and carping, but the chess we played in the seventies and eighties suited me better, those USSR Championships where we were creating the game right in front of the audience. Western players made no bones of the fact that they learned their chess by studying the games at those tournaments.

'I always dreamed of becoming the Champion of the USSR, but the only time I managed to win was in Odessa in 1989, when it wasn't the same Championship any more. I wanted to win a classic tournament where all the big names were playing: Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, Kortchnoi...

'I would describe my style as universal, except my defence wasn't very strong; I always tried to counter-attack, like Kortchnoi – I wasn't so good at an orderly, patient defence. That was something Petrosian was good at – he was a great player.

'I probably played best in 1985, when I won four tournaments in a row, and an Interzonal with a considerable lead, and shared top place in the Candidates' tournament. Of course there were failures as well. Why? I lost my taste for the game, I suppose, I didn't have that obsession with winning: after all, I'm no Kortchnoi or Beliavsky. Apart from that – lack of motivation, lack of persistence, and then there were my friends, you know what I mean, everything was fun, we all had lots of fun... With Tolya everything was set up thoroughly, whereas I only had

a trainer for a week, a month, when there was a tournament. Though I often beat Karpov between 1969 and 1971.

‘What do you lose as you get older? A bit of everything: motivation, memory, desire, energy. But that’s not the whole story. The main thing is you start thinking that chess isn’t everything in life. And then there are losses, the losses in your life that leave deep scars on your soul...’

Almost forty years ago a small boy won his game in a clock simul against Max Euwe. Over the decades since then he has played against every champion and every great player of the last century.

The life of any great chess player is indivisible from the games that he played, from his best games. But Vaganian’s best games are also indivisible from the time when they were played, and the place where they were played. Like the 1975 USSR Championship, when he checkmated Beliavsky’s king on the stage of the packed two thousand-seater Armenian Philharmonic Hall, to thunderous applause and cheering.

The unreliable past – it seems that some Eastern languages have a tense with that name, and it seems a good way to describe that time in relation to chess today. But that time did exist, and so did that amazing chess world, and those wonderful players, and he, Rafael Vaganian, was also part of that world.

In the autumn of 2000 I was talking to Viktor Kortchnoi in Istanbul. ‘Vaganian? He has something that makes the pieces move around the board in a way only he can conceive of. His play is something special – and I’ve seen plenty in my time. More than once I’ve seen him play in time pressure, although he had grasped the position instantly. And it happened because he didn’t want to just play – he had to play his own way. Perhaps that’s why he never got close to playing for the world title. He was never a chess practitioner, he was a chess artist, a fantastic chess artist!’

This year the fantastic chess artist Rafael Artyomovich Vaganian celebrates his fiftieth birthday.

June 2001

The Club

A plaque on the façade of the building numbered fourteen on Gogol Boulevard says that this is the Central House of Chess named after Botvinnik. That is now its official name, but everyone still calls it simply 'the Club'. The building is situated in one of the most attractive areas of Moscow. Across the boulevard begin the lanes of the Old Arbat, where almost every house is a piece of history.

The detached house on Gogol Boulevard also has a long and rich history. At the end of the nineteenth century it belonged to Baroness Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, a fervent patron of music, whose annual allowance relieved Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky of any material concerns.

After the Russian Revolution the building was nationalised and in the 1920s the Supreme Court of the Republic was accommodated here, an establishment very distant from chess, although the State Prosecutor and People's Justice Commissar, Nikolay Vasilievich Krylenko, also happened to be the head of Soviet chess and a great supporter of the game.

In the 1930s, until the start of the War, the building gave refuge to political emigrants – French, Polish, Bulgarian and German communists and their families. One of them was Marcus Wolf, then called Misha Volkov, the future all-powerful head of the East German Secret Service.

After the War the house on Gogol Boulevard was occupied by an organisation, engaged in exploiting the natural resources of the Far East – Magadan and Kolyma. It bore the insignificant name 'Dalstroy', literally meaning 'distant construction', but was in fact one of the subdivisions of the Gulag. After Stalin's death the number of people condemned to forced labour diminished and under Khrushchev the organisation fell into decline.

In 1956, on August 18, the house on Gogol Boulevard became the USSR Central Chess Club. The first director was Boris Pavlovich Naglis, and it is generally recognised that the years of his directorship (1957-1970) were the best in the club's history. Naglis stuck to a strict

daily routine. Arriving for work at about eleven, he would first play several blitz games, accompanied by jokes and laughter. During these games Naglis would be brought papers, which he would sign, trying not to tear himself away from the play. Boris Pavlovich always went home for lunch, but the blitz playing would continue in his absence. On one occasion Yury Vasilchuk, who was President of the Moscow Chess Federation, kept losing game after game to a small, provincially-dressed lad. Finally Vasilchuk asked the young boy his name. 'My name is Tolya Karpov', came the brusque reply.

Towards five o'clock Naglis would return to the Club – smelling of eau de Cologne, and always in a starched shirt and tie – and would remain there until late in the evening.

The tournaments and matches that were played in the Club during those times! Spartakiads and Candidates' matches, championships of Moscow and sports societies, and the famous matches on forty boards between teams from Moscow and Leningrad, where the World Champion and former World Champions often played on the top boards. And of course the championships of the club itself with sections on Sundays and Wednesdays, or Saturdays and Thursdays, in which hundreds of players participated. It stands to reason that there were no prizes at all in these tournaments. The only reward the winner could expect was participation in a tournament with a master norm. Next, the winner of such a tournament could hope for a truly fairy-tale prize: participation in one of the international tournaments which were regularly held within the walls of the Club.

Adjourned games of World Championship matches were also resumed in the Club. It was here that Botvinnik sank into thought, forgot about the clock, and lost on time in a winning endgame in the fifteenth game of his return match with Smyslov in 1958. Perhaps this unpleasant memory played a role when later on the Patriarch was reluctant to finish adjourned games here. Or perhaps there was another reason. Before the start of his match against Tal in 1960, Botvinnik, who was in the habit of personally inspecting the coming field of battle, right down to the last detail, asked where the toilet was. On learning that, from the room where the adjournment session was due to take place, on the way to the toilet there was a larger number of steps than he considered acceptable, he flatly refused to play unfinished games in the

Central Chess Club. As it was, a compromise was found: in a small room behind the hall where the games were resumed, a special large pot was installed for the needs of the World Champion. However, malicious tongues began saying that there was no pot at all, and that for this purpose they were using the Hamilton-Russell Cup, awarded for victory in the Olympiad, which at that time was permanently resident within the Club.

The pride of the Club is the Large Hall. Here anniversary evenings would be held or lectures by masters and grandmasters returning from international tournaments. Or simultaneous displays. The hall would then be completely full, the chandelier, which dated back to older times, would be sparkling, and behind those playing there would be a solid wall of fans suggesting moves or watching admiringly the unhurried circling of Botvinnik, Smyslov or Petrosian. A particular attraction was provided by simultaneous displays on ten boards with clocks, in which the strongest young players from the city took part. In one such event – against Bent Larsen – the fifteen-year-old Borya Gulko played, and he was the only one to win against the rising star from the West.

The Chigorin Hall is situated directly opposite the Large Hall. Here, under the strict glance of the founder of the Russian Chess School, on Wednesdays lectures were read, and sometimes consultation games were played. A demonstration board would be set up, and in front of it would be seated several dozen enthusiasts who would discuss aloud possible continuations in their game with a grandmaster. When the consultants reached an agreement, the move was conveyed to the maestro, who would usually be seated in the Grandmaster Room, and while his reply was awaited the discussion would continue.

Operating in the Club was a children's and junior school and a masters' office, which was directed by Alexander Alexandrovich Kotov. The versatile grandmaster not only analysed games with his pupils, but also checked here his theory about 'candidate moves', 'analysis trees' and 'thickets of variations', trying to penetrate into the secrets of a chess player's thinking.

The Grandmaster Room was the most prestigious in the Club. It had splendid furniture, an old fireplace made of dark red marble, paintings with chess subjects, portraits of grandmasters, and caricatures. This

room would be used for discussions about matches for the World Championship, the resumption of unfinished games from World Championship and Candidates' matches, and meetings, sometimes secret, at which was decided the fate of Soviet, and sometimes world chess. Some thought that this room was equipped with a special listening device, which was operated on especially important occasions. 'Damn it; I forgot to switch the machine on', exclaimed Vladimir Antoshin, trainer of the Federation, after some FIDE officials had proceeded into the Grandmaster Room and the meeting had already begun.

But it was not only meetings and the adjournment sessions of important matches that were held in this room. If, for example, Tal or Stein were on a visit to Moscow, and they went into the Club and expressed the desire to play a few blitz games, the Grandmaster Room would be ceremoniously opened. On such occasions only the chosen few would be allowed in as spectators, who would hold their breath as they followed the encounter of the top grandmasters. Pawns and pieces would be sacrificed right, left and centre, the mountain of cigarette ash in the trays would grow, while outside the window dusk would set in.

On Mondays chess composers gathered in the Grandmaster Room. These included many people whose names were well-known in this world of chess poetry. At those sessions you could see Alexander Gulyaev, Doctor of Sciences and professor, Alexander Kazantsev, science fiction writer, Boris Sakharov, metallurgist and Academic, Lev Loshinsky, mathematician, or Abram Gurvich, a well-known literary and theatre critic, who suffered during the campaign against 'cosmopolitanism'.

In the summer of 1988 I spent ten successive days in this room with the young Jeroen Piket at a session of the Botvinnik School. It was a hot summer, and there was no one in the Club, except that in a neighbouring room two young lads were playing training games. 'Very, very capable', the Patriarch explained when we had a break and strayed in there. The names of the boys were Volodya Kramnik and Misha Oratovsky. Botvinnik, as usual, was not mistaken, except perhaps as regards the degrees of talent. Only last year in an open tournament in Lisbon Oratovsky achieved his first grandmaster norm.

Once during our lessons we heard the sound of confidently approaching steps. The door was flung open and into the Grandmaster Room walked the former director of the Club, Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky. He had by then retired, but he was still in the habit of occasionally looking in at the Club. On seeing me alongside Botvinnik, he was completely non-plussed, and after saying 'Excuse me', he left the room. 'What's the world coming to', we heard his voice, 'next year we'll be allowing Kortchnoi to come to Moscow...'

In the chaotic years of the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Grandmaster Room had a temporary change of ownership. Quite in the spirit of those times, it was taken over by a parapsychologist, who held his sessions there. In the end, both the pictures and the caricatures disappeared from the walls, and the room itself, with its normal office furniture, now resembles thousands of others in the city.

The monumental first-floor balcony can be reached from the Hall of the Club. One who, in his time, stood on this balcony, swaying and trying to remain unnoticed, was the talented master Edgar Chaplinsky, who everyone called simply Chapa. Looking through the window, he was listening to a heated discussion in the Chigorin Hall, concerning the question if he should be disqualified or not for regularly turning up at the Club in a drunken state. The opinions of the members of the commission were divided. Some insisted on the strictest measure, while others were for allowing him a last chance to mend his ways. In the end, Chaplinsky, whose talent had even been compared with that of Spassky, grew tired of the role of passive observer, and he switched to active measures. Undoing his trousers, he leaned forward, trying from the window to sprinkle the members of the commission. With this act he put an end to all debates and, of course, signed his own official exclusion from chess.

In the early 1960s one could often meet Boris Spassky in the lobby of the Club. The future World Champion had moved to Moscow from Leningrad and always drew a crowd. With great mastery Boris told anecdotes about Lenin, imitating splendidly the diction and facial expressions of the leader of the proletariat. The times then were comparatively liberal, but despite this the listeners around him gradually thinned...

One who never budged from the Club was the young master Yasha Murey. He was supposed to be working on the Club's card index, but in reality from morning until late evening Yasha played blitz or analysed positions, when with a characteristic rapid movement of the fingers he would ceaselessly change the places of two pieces that had already been removed from the board. Since that time forty years have passed, and grandmaster Murey, who for everyone is still Yasha, can be seen doing the same in chess cafés in Tel Aviv, Paris or Amsterdam.

The Club at that time was impossible to imagine without a quiet, unsmiling man, who everyone knew and who knew everyone. Of uncertain age, with sad eyes, always wearing blue armlets, he was regarded as a technician, responsible for the equipment, chess sets and clocks. The remains of his hair, with its indeterminate colour and grey streaks, could not camouflage his extensive bald patch. Everyone called him Izya, and now, decades later, it has proved impossible to establish his patronymic, and only experts were able to remember his simple, earthy surname – Zemlyansky. Izya Zemlyansky's finest hour would come when in the Large Hall lectures were given, or a grandmaster returning from abroad would demonstrate his games from a tournament that had just finished. Izya was a natural demonstrator, or rather he was the king of demonstrators. The trained pieces, obedient to his will, would move around the demonstration board at a single touch of his wooden cue. 'If White had been tempted here by d5', said the grandmaster, and at the same instant Izya would twice knock with his cue on the central square, 'then Black would gain command of the c5 square' – Izya's cue would instantly move to the neighbouring square – 'to where the knight is aiming', the lecturer would continue, 'and White has great problems.' Here Izya would look at the audience with eyes that were even more sorrowful than usual.

For his demonstrating work he was paid one rouble an evening, and his wage at the Club was miserly, but if anyone needed five roubles before payday, for some reason they would only ask him, and Izya would always open his worn-out purse and offer the requester a blue note. Izya Zemlyansky was dismissed in the early 1970s, when the Club came under new management, and his work was considered superfluous.

Another relic of the Club was Nikolay Andreevich Sirotin, who

worked in it for almost fifty years. He was effectively the assistant manager, and a master of all trades. If the telephone was out of action or the electricity went off, Kolya Sirotin would put everything in order. He still works there, selling chess books in the vestibule. He even lives in the Club, in a box room, in the basement.

It is also impossible to imagine the Club of those days without Alexandra Alexeevna Koroleva, who worked in it almost since the day it was founded. Shura Koroleva did not simply open and close the Club, and give out the chess sets, clocks and scoresheets – she was a full member of the great chess family. She was known by everyone, from the very little ones, who arrived for lessons with their grandmas, to all the esteemed grandmasters. Before her eyes had passed generations of players. She had known them all: Romanovsky, Botvinnik, Keres, Duz-Khotimirsky, Levenfish, Kan and Maizelis. From junior competitions she still remembers Spassky, Tal, Gurgennidze and Nei. Shura Koroleva knew about all the domestic affairs of the chess players, the health of their wives, the birthdays of their children, anniversaries and family festivals.

Every evening from a hundred chests there would burst a mournful ah!!, when at precisely eleven, to general despair, after repeating several times the warning that it was time to close and that tomorrow the Club would again be open, Shura Koroleva would take the radical decision to turn out the lights. For a few more minutes it was possible in the dark to move the pieces by touch, and somewhere the bashing of chess clocks could still be heard, but gradually it would all quieten down, the last visitors would descend the marble staircase, the cloakroom attendants would stand below clutching piles of the last overcoats, and the crowds would stream to the metro stations and the trolley-bus stops.

When the large chess congregation arrived in the evening at the Club, together with their coats they would leave in the cloakroom the strict segregation, age categories and professional distinctions that penetrated society. Here they were no longer the bookkeeper, turning all day the handle of the calculator, nor the director of medical services, nor the scientist of world renown, nor the boy pining all day at school in expectation of the evening bliss.

For them the Club was a festival – that fine detached building in the centre of Moscow with its marble staircase, its hall lit by a crystal chandelier, with its moulded adornments on the ceiling, with its strip of carpet on the parquet floor and its old fireplace. This was their own Carlton Club on St James Street, where they could come every evening, see familiar faces, and spend that evening at a pastime that they loved. And the fact that in the library in the Carlton Club were hanging portraits of such esteemed members as Gladstone and Churchill, whereas in the entrance to the Club visitors were greeted by a large picture of Brezhnev embracing World Champion Karpov, what did it matter?

And what did it matter if, in contrast to the members of the London club who arrived there in their own cars from their own houses in Hampstead, they reached their Club on the metro from a one-room flat, a filthy communal block, or a student hostel? Here on the staircase one could meet the live Petrosian, in trainers and sports shirt, who had returned to Moscow from his dacha and had called in for a minute to the building on Gogol Boulevard. Or see Lilienthal, yes, yes, that same Lilienthal who sacrificed his queen against the great Capablanca, and alongside him the short-stepping Salo Flohr, whose article 'Big Misha and little Misha' had been read that day in the magazine *Ogonyok*. And if you were really lucky, you would see Tal himself, and – an unforgettable day – sit the whole evening almost alongside him as he played blitz, and even offer him a cigarette when his own had run out.

They played chess, devoting all their free time to it, not for the sake of a fee, reputation, recognition or success, but only and exclusively for the sake of chess itself. All of them were equal before the board with its 64 squares, before the not yet demystified chess of the last century. From the world of manipulated information, meetings and trade union committees they moved into an honest, pure world, in which the outcome was decided only by mastery and talent. And those who breathed this chess air were for ever marked by some special sign that even distinguishes them now, at the start of a new century.

Within this chess brotherhood there was a clear hierarchy. Among them: numerous parishioners – the ordinary enthusiasts; strutted the bishops – candidate masters; the metropolitans – masters with the square badge of distinction on their jacket; and the most distinguished of them: the apostles – international masters. Grandmasters were gods.



Seventeen-year-old Anatoly Lutikov in his first Leningrad championship (1950).



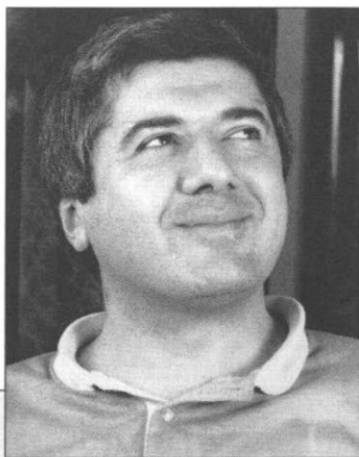
Lutikov in the early sixties.



Fifteen-year-old Bobby Fischer playing blitz against Tigran Petrosian at the Central Chess Club during his historic visit in 1958.



Rafael Vaganian playing Anatoly Karpov in the match tournament held in the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers in 1969.



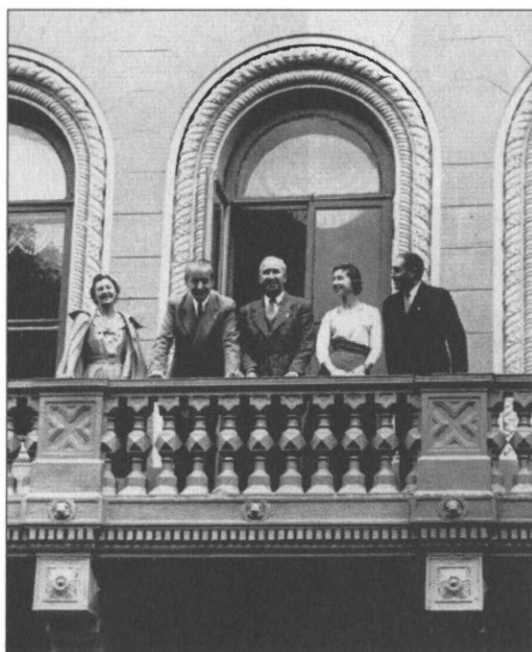
'The crown prince of Armenian chess'



Mikhail Tal, Tigran Petrosian and Rafael Vaganian at the Keres Memorial in Tallinn in 1979.



'Dullness, ordinariness, decay, disreputable appearance – all these definitions now apply to a building that at one time was the centre of chess life and, without exception, received all the world champions of the second half of the twentieth century.'



FIDE president Folke Rogard on the balcony of the Central Chess Club in 1956. The men on his right are vice-presidents Ragozin and Berman.



The Club museum's curator Tatiana Mikhailovna Kolesnikovich next to the table of the first Karpov-Kasparov match.



Viktor Baturinsky in his finest hour, the World Championship match between Karpov and Kortchnoi in Baguio in 1978.

Whereas in other fields – literature, music, philosophy, history, cinema – Soviet people were brought up on a strict diet, including numerous prohibitions, chess was not affected. It is no accident that from the end of the 1960s to the mid-'80s, the representatives of other professions – writers, artists, philosophers, sometimes famous – left their jobs to become caretakers, boiler-men or watchmen. In chess this did not happen. Chess itself was something that they left for.

The Chinese scientists of the Qin dynasty were inclined to evaluate a person only by his knowledge, not taking into account his political views, moral traits or life style, which led to the flourishing of poetry and science at that time. It was the same in chess: grandmasters and masters, who differed by upbringing, education and nationality, in the final analysis were judged only by their mastery, talent, and the strength of their play.

The face of the Club began to change from the early 1970s, with the arrival of a new director, Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky. 'This is an institution, an institution devoted to chess, and don't stop me working', he repeated many times. 'Why are you diverting my staff from their work', he said to Yury Razuvaev, when the latter decided to show, as usual, a game that he had just played to Konstantinopolsky. From the director's office one could no longer hear the bashing of the clock and cheerful laughter. Neither the boss himself played, nor did the young masters play blitz in his presence.

Although outwardly much on the detached house on Gogol Boulevard remained the same, something had vanished. The homely, relaxed atmosphere had been lost. The Club had indeed come to resemble an institution. 1981 saw the last international tournament of the Central Chess Club, essentially the only traditional tournament held at that time in the country.

A year before this chess players received at their disposal the hitherto empty second floor of the building, to where the entire administrative apparatus was moved, although for trainers and instructors the rooms on the first floor were retained.

In October last year the second floor of the Club was taken over by the editorial office of the magazine 64 – *Shakhmatnoe obozrenie*. A couple of months before this, the editor-in-chief of 64, Alexander Borisovich

Roshal, had achieved this chess number in terms of years. Roshal has been working in the magazine for more than thirty years, since the time when it was founded, and the young staff are convinced that under the pseudonym Bobrov, Roshal published the magazine *Shakhmatnoe obozrenie* back at the start of the last century.

The changes that have taken place in Russia over the past decade did not fail to affect chess. The struggle that developed for the Club – after all a splendid building in the very centre of the city – was full of victories, defeats, concessions and legal processes. In the end, the chess players managed to defend their Club, but they are still a long way from making it a real house of chess players, as it was in olden times. Dullness, ordinariness, decay, disreputable appearance – all these definitions now apply to a building that at one time was the centre of chess life and, without exception, received all the World Champions of the second half of the twentieth century. Whereas, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, living in the detached house on Gogol Boulevard were patrons who donated money to art, now, at the start of the twenty-first century the existence of the House of Chess Players is fully dependent on sponsors: tenants of a prestigious building in the very centre of Moscow.

The first day of September 2001. Although according to the calendar it is already autumn, the trees on Gogol Boulevard are still completely green, and on the benches there are old women with grandchildren, just like many years ago. From the flat of David Ionovich Bronstein to the Club it is just a stone's throw, but the grandmaster admits that he has not been there for ages.

The Club is visible from afar due to the gaudy yellow panels advertising the restaurant inside, which occupies the entire right wing of the building and is continuing to expand. The 'Stary Svet' restaurant rents space from the Club, as does a bookmaker's office, which offers odds on all possible sports competitions, from boxing to American football. We enter the Club and in the vestibule directly opposite the door we see a guard in the usual green uniform with black spots. Just two years ago he would have recorded all visitors in a large ledger, whereas now he limits himself to the question: 'Whom do you want?' Alongside the guard is Kolya Sirotin with his books and magazines on a shelf.

We bear slightly to the left and by a short corridor we arrive at the Club's library. In it there are many rarities: first editions of Philidor and Petroff, and complete sets of Russian and foreign magazines. There is *Shakhmatny Vestnik*, both Chigorin's, and also of the later period, which was published right up to the start of the First World War by Alexey Alekhine, the brother of the future World Champion. Here too is the first chess book of Tisha himself – as Alekhine was called when he was young – a chess primer in French by Jean-Louis Preti published in 1895, with an accurate tick alongside each game that had been played through.

The Club's library has thousands of books in various languages. Many of them have the autographs of Grigoriev and Zubarev. These books once belonged to these well-known masters. In the autumn of 1958 a little boy stood here looking through the books, quite unable to make a choice. 'Take this one, you won't regret it', suggested a voice, and he was handed *The Art of Sacrifice* by Spielmann. That voice was David Bronstein's, who in this same library had gone over several games that the boy had played, engraving that day for ever on the memory of future grandmaster Yuriy Razuvaev.

Now the library is closed, but for us an exception is made, and we enter. There is dust on the shelves, on the tables are fading magazines from 1993, and it is evident that it is rare for anyone to look in here.

'On no account', says the curator of the Club's museum and library Tatiana Mikhailovna Kolesnikovich, when we want to pass through into the second room, 'It may all collapse at any moment.' Indeed, the struts supporting the roof do not look particularly secure.

The Club's museum has existed since 1980. It basically comprises items from the collection of the well-known Leningrad collector Viacheslav Dombrovsky. When he died, it transpired that the right of inheritance was claimed by two women, both of whom declared themselves to be the widow of the deceased. The legal chaos lasted rather a long time, and was not in fact resolved. The collection was divided into two parts, one of which was acquired by Lothar Schmid, and the other by the Club.

There is much of interest: chess sets of various periods and countries, made from wood, china, clay and metal, encrusted boards and

bas-reliefs. Busts of Voltaire, Napoleon, Pushkin and Turgenev, who at various stages of their lives became fascinated by the game.

Here too there are prizes, awards and cups, won by Soviet players in the post-war years. Bronstein stops by a special prize, received for the victory in the USSR-USA radio match, which took place in September 1945. The Soviet players crushed the Americans 15½-4½ and received the personal praise of Stalin. Fifty-six years ago young Devik Bronstein took part in this match and easily won both his games against Santasiere. He recalls that the games began at five o'clock in the afternoon by Moscow time and lasted ten to twelve hours.

In an honourable place is the most important of the trophies, the Hamilton-Russell Cup, which has already been mentioned. The chess table, at which were played the games of the Moscow matches for the World Championship between Karpov and Kasparov, with two flags on it with the hammer and sickle, takes us back to times that are comparatively recent, but which today seem like the distant past.

However, the museum exhibits, like everything, have their relative value. Whereas in Soviet times the attention of visitors was drawn to a chess set on which Lenin played with his nephew, now the pride of the Museum is a set made specially for the children of the last Russian Tsar.

The Large Hall is deserted. It's been a long time since chess was played here. Nowadays the room is often used for weddings and receptions. In early December the second round of the FIDE World Championship took place here, when the players temporarily had to leave the Kremlin because of a state visit by the Ukrainian president. In the Chigorin Hall tournaments are still held occasionally, but the portrait of the man who gave the room its name is no longer there. His clear but strict glance might embarrass the guests at an evening reception, for which the table has already been laid.

A room on the first floor, where at one time chess battles took place, now accommodates the Botvinnik Fund, publishing books connected with the achievements of the Patriarch. Nowhere to be seen are either people playing chess, or chess pieces.

Evening draws in. We descend the staircase. In the vestibule Kolya Sirotin is already packing up his books. 'Anything new, Kolya?' 'Yes, this has just come out.' He holds out a book in a purple cover, published by the Botvinnik Fund: *The Botvinnik-Bronstein Match*, about a match

for the World Championship played exactly half a century ago. Bronstein begins turning over the pages. He shakes his head: 'See what Botvinnik writes about the third game of the match. If you like, I'll tell you what really happened...'

We go out onto Gogol Boulevard, turn to the left, and unhurriedly make our way to the Kropotkinskaya metro station.

Kropotkinskaya? As a seventeen-year-old youth I first played in the Club in competitions of the 'Burevestnik' sports society. A shabby hotel a few bus stops from the metro station. Four to a room. Cigarette smoke. Nighttime analysis. Blitz. Winter. Crowded bus. Heavy metro doors. Steam issuing from heating grilles. Five kopeck piece at the ready. Escalator plunging underground. Fur hats and headscarves. A black, unsmiling crowd. Rizhskaya, Novoslobodskaya, Mayakovskaya. Stations, stations, shafts of light flying to the end of the train. But closer, closer, and now a metallic voice in the metro carriage is saying: 'Watch out, the doors are closing. The next station is Kropotkinskaya.' Snow on the boulevard benches. Crush at the cloakroom. A last cigarette. Now the tournament arbiter is making his way between the tables, starting the clocks with a pistol-like crack, and he is already approaching your table.

Moscow. Gogol Boulevard. The Club. The wonderful January of 1961.

March 2002

My Testimony

Viktor Baturinsky 1914-2002

He was a man from the era of the grandiose chess of the Soviet period, when thousands of people in concert halls, holding their breath, followed the movements of wooden pieces, when there were special late-night chess broadcasts on radio and television, and when questions relating to chess were decided at the level of the government, the Party Central Committee, and the KGB.

Whatever the name given to the post occupied by Viktor Baturinsky: Director of the Central Club, Head of the Chess Section, Chief Trainer and Inspector of the USSR Sports Committee, or leader of the Soviet delegation at matches for the World Championship or at Olympiads, for almost two decades he stood at the head of Soviet chess and was accepted in this capacity in the West. But this was only his second career, which began immediately after he retired in 1970. In his first he was a prosecutor, a military prosecutor, one of the servants of Justice in that sinister time when the word itself was further from its meaning than at any other time in history.

I first saw Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky in the summer of 1974 during the Olympiad in Nice. He was the head of the Soviet delegation, but he did not experience any anxiety concerning the battles at the chess board: the Soviet grandmasters easily won that Olympiad. It was another matter at the FIDE Congress: here there were heated debates regarding the forthcoming match between Fischer and Karpov. When during the course of these debates the United States representative Edmondson said to Baturinsky: 'You are wrong to threaten delegates that Soviet players will not travel to their countries, if they do not support your position', Baturinsky replied to him, forgetting himself: 'If Fischer continues to behave like this, he will have to play a match with Negroes from the Bahamas!' A sentence which Edmondson promptly communicated to the congress delegates. There is no doubt that, within his own circle Baturinsky could have allowed himself to say something even cruder, but here, in public, this was not such a good idea...

'It was a foolish thing to say, one of those when your speech runs ahead of your thoughts', Viktor Davydovich himself later admitted.

Two years later I saw him in Biel at the Interzonal tournament. Following my emigration from the Soviet Union, any form of contact was ruled out and he pretended not to notice me. Initially I was of little interest to Baturinsky. Kortchnoi had just requested political asylum in Holland, so that he had plenty on his plate without me. Besides, in the tournament itself things were going far from brilliantly. Larsen was leading and in the end he took first place. Apart from him Portisch and Hübner were also offering serious rivalry to the Soviet players.

After making a short draw with Tal, I was standing in the foyer of the tournament hall. Suddenly I noticed Baturinsky heading my way. He came up to me and after shaking hands he said, smiling: 'You are playing Portisch tomorrow.' I nodded. 'Well, bear in mind that we have full documentation on him, moreover we can help you with your preparations...' Viktor Davydovich suggested. I courteously but firmly declined: 'Thanks, but as it is I have all the information I need.' He looked at me mistrustfully: 'Mmm... Well, think about it. It would be no problem...'

The following day, when I played Portisch, I noticed Baturinsky sitting in the first row of the spectators. The lenses of his spectacles were gleaming and the expression on his face evoked thoughts of the lines by Alexander Blok '...she looks, looks at you with hatred and with love', reminding me of the motherland that I had left. With black I played the Nimzo-Indian Defence badly, and after a breakthrough in the centre my position became untenable. A few moves later I resigned. It need hardly be said that after this Baturinsky lost all interest in me.

After this I saw him many times at various tournaments and matches, and we exchanged bows, but in 1993, in Amsterdam at Karpov's match with Timman, he was courtesy itself.

The last time I saw him was in October 1999 in Moscow, where I visited him in his home. He was 85 years old now and he had reached that age when every granted day was a favour, but also very often a penalty: he had deteriorated even more, with one eye he could not see at all, with the other very poorly, and he could only read the newspa-

per with a strong magnifying glass. His hearing was bad, and from time to time he asked me to repeat what I had said, but his mind was still sharp, he formulated his thoughts very clearly. We chatted for several hours in his study.

'I had seven and a half thousand books, probably the biggest chess library in the Soviet Union. I sold it to Karpov – I needed the money', he sighed. 'But I know that at least it will be in good hands...'

I realised, of course, that the chances of a frank conversation were slight: significant episodes from his life and work were impenetrable and there were hardly any witnesses left. He would spin the record that he once pre-recorded, except that after a pause he would give cautious replies to my direct questions, always aiming, however, to return the needle to the already established groove of the record. He never approached those weighty boxes in the recesses of his brain, on which was written 'store for ever'. He knew much, very much. He wrote speeches for all the head prosecutors of the army, who in his time changed five times – he outlived them all.

He was a typical official of the Stalinist times, who gave to the system all his strength, all his time, all his energy. It was those like him, capable, energetic and purposeful, who were the motivators of that amazing and now nonexistent state.

In his perception of people, as with Botvinnik, right to the end, to his last day, the word 'Soviet' was a definition of good and correct, whereas 'anti-Soviet' was just the opposite. He once said to Boris Gulko, who had already submitted his documents for leaving the country: 'But you are a Soviet person', resorting to the last, and in his eyes the strongest argument.

When I switched on the tape recorder, he looked slightly askance at it: Viktor Davydovich knew only too well what was meant by a testimony, but he did not say anything.

'I was born in Odessa. All my ancestors on both my mother's and my father's side were Jews. I moved to Moscow when I was a boy, I was ten years old. I remember well the day of Lenin's funeral; with my father I walked past the coffin in the Hall of Columns.

'There in Moscow I was taught to play chess by a girl who was one of our neighbours. I began playing regularly with my father and started

to beat him. In 1925 we went to the Moscow tournament, where I saw Lasker for the first time. I played Capablanca in a simultaneous display in 1935, when he was there for the Second International tournament. Of course, Capa had no idea of the strength of first-category players in the Soviet Union and lost fourteen games. He had promised to finish within four hours, but the last game – with me – went on deep into the night. I had a completely won position: two extra pawns in the endgame, but he was already very irritated and he kept repeating: ‘*Mon-sieur, vite, monsieur, vite*’, and I ran into a ‘desperado’ rook.

‘Why did I go in for law? On the recommendation of Krylenko. At first I entered the History Faculty of the university, but Krylenko summoned me to him and asked ‘Why history? With your logical thinking and polemic capabilities, law would suit you very well. That was in 1934. No, I don’t regret that I did not take history. I think that it all turned out quite well...

‘In general, I knew Krylenko from when I was young. I was still a boy when I was taken to see him, and we played a few games. He played at something like second-category strength. Later I often discussed chess matters with him. When Krylenko was declared an ‘enemy of the people’, I did not believe it, but, of course, you couldn’t show anything.

‘I became a justice colonel at the age of 37. I was a prosecutor in the investigatory department of general surveillance, and I travelled a great deal around the country. The laws then were severe, of course, but for the army they were necessary at that time. What do you have now in the army? Complete disorder...

‘No, I was never involved in political trials. Never. Did I request the death penalty and lengthy prison terms? Yes, of course, but these weren’t political cases. The only period in my career when I was involved in political trials was in 1956. I was working in the rehabilitation commission and looked at more than a thousand cases.’

I travelled backwards with him along the river of time, and he skilfully manoeuvred along it, avoiding snags, sandbanks, the skeletons of wrecked ships and dangerous currents, which could have carried him into the violent whirlpools of the history of the country he served.

‘I was on friendly terms with Botvinnik, whom I had known since

back in the thirties. He was a difficult person and he had his oddities, that is true. He could ask: 'What is the date today – 28 October 1958?' Before 28 October 1960 I won't converse with you!' I don't mean that this actually happened, but this was the kind of thing he was capable of saying.'

Was there anything he regretted?

He didn't reply for a long time, and I also kept silent. A clever, penetrating glance through the thick glass of his spectacles, two patches of grey hair, framing his bald, broad skull; the sound of his heavy breathing.

'I am not ready for that question... Well, there were, of course, isolated mistakes... but not so much on the chess front, generally speaking, but that was how things were then and, no, I don't regret anything...'

One of Balzac's heroes says: 'When you sit down to play belote, you do not dispute the rules of the game.'

For Viktor Baturinsky it was not necessary, closing his eyes, to accept the rules of the game: the new power itself took the decision for him, and he served it perfectly sincerely, without any mental bifurcation. He did not have to re-educate himself, and get accustomed to new concepts and new orders: he did not know any others.

He himself became a part of that State and he remained loyal to it throughout his long life, and the State knew that this loyalty was unbounded.

It is said that at one meeting of the Chess Federation, when the behaviour of a player who had committed some misdemeanour was being discussed, Baturinsky said heatedly: 'During the war we used to shoot such people.' Although the time was now the 1970s, a hush fell: Viktor Davydovich knew what he was talking about: during the war he had worked in SMERSH, one of the departments of the KGB, where the function of a prosecutor was fairly simple: to rubber-stamp the decisions of military field courts...

While being himself a Jew, he consistently carried out state policies in that field where the presence of Jews was especially felt. In chess they were particularly successful, and their names were widely known, both in the USSR, and abroad. Of course, he, like the high command,

had to reconcile himself to the fact that many leading chess players were Jews, but for the rest...

He unhesitatingly crossed out Jewish names from lists of candidates for a stipend, for foreign trips, and from claims for a title.

Iosif Dorfman helped Polugaevsky prepare for his match with Kortchnoi in 1980 and was getting ready for a trip to Buenos Aires. After the end of the session an upset Polugaevsky met Dorfman: 'You know, I have just been speaking with Baturinsky. You are not going; he said that in that case the delegation would have too many Jews...'

'Where is your report?' he asked of Rafael Vaganian, who had just returned from abroad. 'I submitted it to the Committee yesterday, Viktor Davydovich', the latter replied. 'To the Committee, that means...' Baturinsky frowned. 'And who is your boss, me or the Committee?' he attacked Vaganian, who was then one of the strongest grandmasters in the world.

At the same time, in his rudeness there was something comical, comedian-like. He was a kind of Danny DeVito and I think that he could have played any character role without resorting to make-up, by simply remaining himself. Small, stout, panting, with constantly blinking eyes, he was called by Misha Tal 'a little pug-dog', in reply to which Boris Gulko gloomily commented: 'To some a pug-dog, but to others a rotweiler.'

Anyone who went into his office had to be prepared for rudeness, a dressing-down, stamping of feet, a splash of expectorate and a demand to write an explanatory report.

'What was the reason for you returning a day late? Write an explanatory report', he began severely reprimanding a grandmaster who had returned from a foreign tournament. 'There was a strike, Viktor Davydovich, a pilots' strike...' the latter began justifying himself. 'A strike? And who gave permission?' Baturinsky stuck to his guns.

At the Olympiad in Malta the USSR women's team played a draw with the Chinese. At that time this was a sensation. 'How could you allow it? How could you allow such a thing, Nona? After all, you are a member of the Party', Baturinsky shouted at Nona Gaprindashvili. 'Tomorrow, when they phone from Moscow, I'll hand you the phone – you will have to do the explaining...'

A sense of danger, the ability to understand what the authorities wanted, to sense which way the wind would be blowing tomorrow, and the most important – not to stick his head above the parapet. All these qualities developed during the long years of working in the military prosecutor's office, came in very useful to Baturinsky when he became head of chess in the Soviet Union.

In 1974 Schelokov, the Minister of Internal Affairs, turned up at the Karpov-Kortchnoi match in the Hall of Columns in Moscow. 'How was it that you gave up the crown to an American? All those who were there in Reykjavik, with Spassky, I would have arrested', he declared bluntly. Baturinsky was very proud of his reply to the minister: 'I wasn't there!'

Boris Spassky recalls: 'During the match with Fischer he could not have been of any help to me, he might only have disturbed me. Baturinsky realised perfectly well that I would lose that match, and so he did not go to Reykjavik, as was also the case with Bondarevsky, who before the match left me.'

Baturinsky was an author and compiler of chess books. Thus he worked with Botvinnik for several years, preparing for publication all the games of the first Soviet World Champion, and he was the author-compiler of a book about Flohr and about many others. At the end of his life he wrote a book of reminiscences. When he published this book, some were disappointed: 'Why, Viktor Davydovich, you've only skated over the surface. But you know much more, after all we ourselves have heard things from you...'

He would reply: 'The time has not yet come...' He thought that the secrets that he did not disclose would be better stored in history.

Baturinsky's finest hour was the World Championship match between Anatoly Karpov and Viktor Kortchnoi in the Philippines in 1978. He was the leader of Karpov's delegation and in this capacity he became one of the main actors on the stage of the theatre, which this World Championship match became. Baturinsky knew perfectly well at what level they were interested in this match. In the Sports Committee, in the reception room of the office of its president S.P. Pavlov there was a chess board, at which during the games in Baguio one of the grand-

masters was constantly present, in order to give a competent report if they should phone from the Secretariat of the Central Committee: according to eyewitnesses, Brezhnev used to ask several times a day: 'How's our Tolik doing?'

At all the meetings of the match jury, in his memorandums, reports and appeals, Viktor Baturinsky, brilliantly upheld the position of the Soviet side, demonstrating its right, and time after time he left the enemy camp in a state of despair, anger and impotence.

Viktor Kortchnoi, who at the time called Baturinsky 'a person with the general morals of a criminal, who has no right to represent a delegation that has arrived to play chess', today, nearly quarter of a century later, says that 'although Baturinsky was an obedient soldier and he carried out well the orders of his superiors, he was an excellent lawyer, and it was thanks to him that there in Baguio the Soviets so splendidly held their own in all the negotiations. Karpov is indebted to Baturinsky for much, very much: Baturinsky was a worthy defender of him, and of the entire system.'

It is no secret to anyone that Kortchnoi has always liked the attention of the press. It is not hard for a journalist to stir him up, induce him to speak frankly, and to move from chess onto other topics. The members of the state security committee who were then 'monitoring' Kortchnoi did not overlook this fact. As Lev Alburt recalls: 'It was in Moscow in 1978, a few months after Karpov's match with Kortchnoi. I always had good relations with Baturinsky, and in the close circles in which we met he would be drawn into reminiscing. He said that, on arriving in the Philippines, he contacted two journalists from a Thai newspaper, rather right-wing, who in fact were, if not Soviet agents, then certainly with a pro-Soviet leaning. Baturinsky explained their task and arranged their visit to the Philippines. As expected, Kortchnoi very readily agreed to an interview, in the course of which the journalists gradually turned from chess problems to the internal politics of the Philippines. He attacked not only Campomanes, for playing up to the Soviets, but also President Marcos himself, using very strong language. The newspaper with the published interview was sent to the Soviet embassy in Manila, the text of the interview was translated, and then via Marcos' aids it came in front of the President himself, who, naturally, was not pleased

by Kortchnoi's statements. Campomanes too was infuriated. Starting from this moment, Campomanes, who up till then had tried to observe at least an outward neutrality, was completely on our side. He even participated in our meetings, where methods were developed for combatting the Kortchnoi camp, Baturinsky proudly said.'

Of interest are the opinions of people who knew Baturinsky at that time when he was the head of Soviet chess.

Boris Spassky: 'Our relations were strictly demarcated: I was a State property, a soldier on the chess front, and he was a high-ranking officer. In the first instance he was a campaigner, a campaigner. I wouldn't say that he was clever, but he had a talent for intrigue, and this is something different, of course, than being clever. At that time there was a very ominous figure – Yudovich, well known for his links with the KGB. I remember once how they were together in Yugoslavia and were plotting their KGB intrigues, when I went into their room and said to them both: '1937 (the year when the Great Terror was at its height – GS) will not return, remember – it will not return.' And with that I left them...'

Anatoly Karpov: 'Viktor Davydovich was an excellent administrator, and if I had to play again a match for the World Championship, I would not hesitate to invite him to be leader of the delegation, since he represented me from 1978 to 1985 in four matches, and did this very well.'

Viktor Kortchnoi: 'A conversation about Baturinsky is a conversation about the historical past, extending far beyond the bounds of chess; it is a story of fascism and communism, and you must begin here with the difference between these two structures. Fascism was destroyed during the last war, whereas communism remained alive and was broken only several decades later. And it is to the fragments of this broken past that Baturinsky belongs. Although he was only a colonel, perhaps not such a high office, in his time he held the post of deputy chief prosecutor in the army. What this means, there is no need to explain: he was accountable for thousands of lives, of course. Although it stands to reason that personally, with his own hands, he did not kill anyone.'

Yury Averbakh: 'As the head of Soviet chess, Baturinsky did not only play a role – everyone plays a role – but he also gained pleasure from it. Like a third-rate actor, gaining once in his life the opportunity to

play Hamlet. And suddenly he seized power. When he was in command, he gained pleasure from that, and everyone saw it.'

He related to people by dividing them into 'us' and 'them', and people who knew him from the one side firmly stand up for their Baturinsky. A reckless serving severity, the zealous fulfilment of any order, however amoral, coexisted in him with a sincere love of chess, chess literature and erudition, even if only Soviet, sometimes also with good-nature, humour and the ability to keep his word. Therefore Igor Zaitsev, who spent long months with Baturinsky at various matches for the World Championship, remembers him as a very kind person and, of course, he is right in his own way, just as the women secretaries called Hitler a very kind and correct person, who would never forget to wish them a happy birthday or enquire after the health of their children.

He acted according to the laws, written for him by the State, even if they, yesterday's laws, contradicted those of the day before yesterday, and today's contradicted yesterday's.

In his career in military justice Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky reached the rank of colonel. Only a lieutenant-colonel was the man of sinister repute who said at his trial in Jerusalem: 'You can call it bifurcation. I separated my conscience and profession from each other... I had to obey. No one can say that I carried out my work badly.'

I think that, when signing papers in his department, Viktor Baturinsky saw only the paragraphs and articles of the law, and without doubts he zealously fulfilled them. When demanding a prison sentence of ten or fifteen years, or even the death penalty, he personally did not experience any pangs of conscience; he was simply carrying out the work entrusted to him.

Two years before his death he said to Karpov: 'I never imagined that I would live to such an age, otherwise I would never have married such a young woman – there are 36 years between us (this was Baturinsky's second marriage – GS) and she is having to be a nurse for me. If I go completely blind', he said, 'I won't hesitate to end it all.'

The thoughts expressed by Baturinsky visit many people in old age, but in spirit he belonged to the same category of people as Botvinnik,

who said proudly about himself: 'I am a materialist' – and with his life and death he demonstrated this.

In old age, in anticipation of the inexorable and inevitable, many try to draw up a balance, think about the past, and try from the standpoint of age and experience to look at the life they have lived and the acts committed. I do not think that he would have lost count, in carrying out such a mental bookkeeping; he had drawn up his balance once and for all: I don't regret anything and I have nothing to be ashamed of.

Intelligent and cynical, loyal and cruel, generous and pragmatic, rude and mild – all this was one and the same person – amusing and terrifying, witty and dull.

On festivals and anniversaries he still wore all his decorations and medals, received from the motherland, which could hardly be accommodated on both sides of his jacket. He was very jealous regarding his numerous titles: in the books that he published, in anniversary articles devoted to him, a considerable space was taken up by the listing of his regalia, titles and duties – the essence of somewhat superfluous words for his epitaph.

At the very end he could see practically nothing: his remaining eye responded only to light and dark.

In his last months he would sometimes dial some number that still remained in his memory and say: 'I am now at a training session. You know where you can find me. Write down my telephone number...' And then could come a totally incomprehensible set of words, until his wife would take the phone from him and apologise.

Viktor Davydovich Baturinsky died on the night of 22 December 2002.

March 2003

The Professor

Max Euwe 1901-1981

In the summer of 1972 I departed the Soviet Union, my luggage consisting entirely of a strong desire to leave the country, a rather sketchy impression of the world that lay beyond its borders and a suitcase full of books. According to the rules I was allowed to carry out only books printed in the country after 1945; books printed before that date required special permission. Overcoming the obstacles thrown up by the bureaucracy, I obtained the desired stamp from the Ministry of Culture – ‘Permission to remove from the USSR’ – for a book printed in 1936.

This was a chess book. I had used it more than once to give children lessons in the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers, where I had worked as a trainer; to this day, I consider it one of the best chess books ever. I still have it. The title page reads: *Max Euwe/Chess Lessons*. When looking at the Dutch title ‘Practische schaaklessen’ on the publisher’s page, I no longer pause at the double ‘a’, so unusual in Russian, in the second word. Little could I have imagined then that within a few months of my leaving, I would be speaking to the author, meeting him frequently and even playing him in a short match.

I saw Euwe for the first time in Amsterdam in the late autumn of 1972, when he asked me to help him with one of his books on opening theory. I agreed; but then my own chess career pushed aside everything else, and we had to give up on this idea.

‘FIDE’s Staff Headquarters’ was the grandiose name given by the Soviet press to a couple of medium-sized rooms on the Passeerdersgracht in downtown Amsterdam, a few minutes’ walk from my home. On my walks I would occasionally look inside. Euwe was very often abroad, but sometimes I would find him in, and then he would ask me to translate letters he received from the Soviet Union. These letters were all very similar and almost always included requests – for autographs, photos or books. ‘Do you think this will be enough?’ he would ask me, as he signed a piece of paper or autographed a photo. ‘More than enough’, I would reply. ‘Do you really think it’s enough?’ he would re-

peat, doubtfully. In his voice, I could hear the intonations of Alexander the Great, who gave a friend fifty talents and, when the man said that ten talents would have been enough, replied: 'For you it would have been enough; it's not enough for me.'

In the autumn of 1975, we played a short two-game match in the studio of the AVRO broadcasting company in Hilversum. There was even a book published about it afterwards – *Chess Match 1975 Euwe-Sosonko* – in which his best games were displayed next to mine. I don't have to tell you what an honour this juxtaposition was for me. The book also spoke of chess in Holland and its new hope – the young Jan Timman. The original plan was for him to have been Euwe's opponent, but Jan's father died just a few days before the starting date.

Later I read, in the detailed research on Euwe's career by the Soviet grandmaster and psychologist Krogius, that 'Euwe willingly submitted to the creation of a central isolated pawn, and had great success playing these positions.' I found this to be true in the very first game of our match, in which I miraculously saved a draw. Krogius was also correct in saying: 'It was most advantageous to prepare some opening novelty – even if, with proper play, it led to no advantage. As a rule, one could count on a strong psychological impact from the unexpected.' The course of the second game fully supported this evaluation as well: the novelty I used in the Slav Defence was no stronger than that used in his match against Alekhine forty years before. But it was obvious that this type of game did not suit him, and I managed to win this game.

Ineke Bakker was Secretary of the International Chess Federation – FIDE – at the time. A few days after the match, she met the USSR Minister of Sports, Sergey Pavlov, in Moscow. 'He was beside himself with rage', she recalled later. 'What – you mean Euwe couldn't find any other opponent for this match? He forgets that he is not just a grandmaster, but the President of the International Chess Federation. This is a provocation, a provocation,' he repeated several times.' It had, of course, never occurred to Euwe to consider the political subtext of our match, even though not a single Soviet grandmaster had come to Wijk aan Zee in Holland a year earlier, precisely because of my participation. Today this seems unbelievable, but in those days, the government considered anyone who left the USSR a traitor whose name should disap-

pear forever from the pages of the national press. It goes without saying that this weapon harks back to primeval magic: cursing someone's name. This technique was known to the ancient Romans as *damnatio memoriae* – a curse on one's memory – when the offending name was scratched from the stone stelae bearing the text of state documents. As described by Orwell, this phenomenon was familiar to the older generation of Soviet citizens, who had clear memories of photographs being doctored and entire pages of history textbooks being erased, and the Great Soviet Encyclopedia replacing biography by geography: instead of the article on Beria they inserted one on the Bering Strait. To this day, I have a copy of a sports journal, published in Leningrad, that reports on a three-way tie for the 1973 Dutch championship between Enklaar and Zuidema.

Six months after my match against Euwe, the Soviet functionaries had to deal with this same problem, but on a considerably larger scale: in the summer of 1976, after the IBM tournament in Amsterdam, Viktor Kortchnoi applied for political asylum in Holland. It was anything but an impulsive decision. In January of that year, at the tournament in Hastings, Kortchnoi and I had spent nearly every evening weighing every possible means for him to defect to the West.

At the opening of that tournament he asked me to help him talk to Euwe. The conversation boiled down to the following: Kortchnoi had many problems in the Soviet Union; his position there was compromised; soon the Candidates' matches would begin, in which he would participate; so what if...

Euwe understood at once. 'Viktor', he said, 'it goes without saying that you will retain all your rights. We will help you, don't worry', and so forth. I translated emotionlessly, understanding the importance of what was happening. It would be wrong to say that this conversation sealed Kortchnoi's decision – it had been a long time in the making – but there can be no doubt that Euwe's friendly, encouraging tone hardened his resolve.

During the course of the conversation, I occasionally glanced at Euwe. He spoke like a man asked for aid and counsel by a colleague: everything he said was spontaneous, that first outpouring of the soul which Talleyrand so cautioned young diplomats against. There was

nothing resembling a calculating politician, the President of a diverse, hard-to-manage federation. Otherwise he might have guessed that the potential decision by this man would make his own life incalculably more difficult. The Soviet Federation, the most influential one in FIDE, harboured considerable animosity toward Euwe after the Fischer-Spassky match. Then it had been Euwe who, by occasionally closing his eyes to the FIDE constitution, did everything in his power to ensure that the match would take place. Fischer's victory dealt a powerful blow to the prestige of the Soviet chess school, and it was doubly painful in that the victory was scored by a representative of the United States of America. The Cold War was at its zenith at the time, with Nixon and Kissinger in the White House and Brezhnev in the Kremlin.

In 1976, Euwe insisted on standing by FIDE's decision to hold the Olympiad in Israel, a country with which the Soviet Union did not have diplomatic relations at the time. This inevitably led to the boycotting of the event by the Soviet Union and almost every other country in the Socialist camp. As a consequence, the defection to the West of one of their strongest grandmasters, a Candidate for the World Championship, was regarded as going beyond the boundaries of sport and becoming a political act. The position taken by Euwe on the Kortchnoi question turned out to be the straw that broke the camel's back of the Soviets' patience. Documents from the KGB's secret archives, rendered accessible only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, show at what level decisions regarding chess were taken in a country where everything was inextricably linked with politics:

Central Committee,

Communist Party of the Soviet Union – SECRET

The Committee on Physical Culture and Sport of the Soviet of Ministries of the USSR, as an addendum to information dated 19th August of this year, concerning the participation of Soviet sportsmen in the chess Olympiad held in Libya in October-November of 1976, and the refusal of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) to alter [the site of] the Chess Olympiad in Israel, considers it necessary to inform you that, in recent years, the situation in FIDE has generally strayed from the norm. M. Euwe, the President of this Federation, has systematically and consistently ignored numerous suggestions proffered by the Socialist countries, and taken measures which bear witness to his pro-American and

pro-Zionist orientation, even to the extent of taking decisions which infringe upon the lawful interests of Soviet chess players. This became especially clear during the preparations for the World Championship matches between the American grandmaster Robert Fischer and Soviet players Boris Spassky and Anatoly Karpov.

In 1974-1975, in the face of objections from the chess federations of the USSR, several Socialist countries and a number of Arab states, M. Euwe decided to hold the Chess Olympics in Israel. Today, it is obvious to anyone that this was a mistake (only 30-35 delegations will be coming to Israel, whereas previous Olympiads drew more than 70 of the 93 countries affiliated to FIDE). However, Euwe stubbornly insists that he will not take away the Olympics from Israel.

Another indication of M. Euwe's one-sided attitude is his refusal to act objectively in the situation which has arisen in connection with Grandmaster Kortchnoi's betrayal of his Homeland. From the very first days of Kortchnoi's stay in the Netherlands, M. Euwe has systematically defended his right to participate in the Candidates' matches for the 1977 World Championship, despite the fact that it has already been pointed out to him — in confidence — that FIDE is enjoined by its Constitution from interfering in the internal affairs of its national federations. M. Euwe's inability to direct the activities of FIDE shows itself in many other matters as well. It is evident that his advanced age (75) is affecting his judgment.

Therefore, the Sports Committee of the USSR considers it advisable that we, together with other Socialist countries, begin secret negotiations with a view to selecting another candidate for the post of FIDE President (from Yugoslavia, perhaps), aiming to go public, towards the end of 1976 or the beginning of 1977, with a request that M. Euwe retire from his post. The FIDE Constitution stipulates that the official Presidential election will be held in 1978.

On behalf of the Committee for Physical Culture and Sport of the Soviet of Ministries of the USSR. S.P. Pavlov, 20 August 1976.

Central Committee,

Communist Party the Soviet Union — SECRET

For a long time now, we have supported contacts and exchanges between the chess players of the USSR and Holland: Soviet players, including many leading grandmasters, participate annually in traditional international tournaments in Holland, while Dutch players have been invited to tournaments in the USSR.

However, in recent years, the Dutch Chess Federation has committed acts of an unfriendly nature towards the USSR; in particular, it has supported chess players emigrating from the USSR and other Socialist countries.

Thus, Holland has become the new home of the former USSR Master of Sport G. Sosonko, who first emigrated to Israel and then took up residence in Holland. Even before obtaining Dutch citizenship, Sosonko was invited to participate in tournaments as its representative. In 1975, in what was clearly intended as an act of propaganda, he played a two-game match with former World Champion, FIDE President M. Euwe. Tournaments in Holland have systematically featured the participation of A. Kushnir, who emigrated to Israel from the USSR, the former Czech player L. Kavalek, who now lives in the USA, and other such persons.

The Dutch Chess Federation is now giving aid and comfort to V. Kortchnoi. The Dutch government has denied Kortchnoi the status of political emigrant (although his temporary Dutch residency is permitted on 'moral and humanitarian' grounds). However, the Dutch Chess Federation has nevertheless undertaken to represent his interests in the Candidates' events.

Understanding that all these steps have political repercussions, the USSR Sports Committee finds it necessary to cancel the sending of Soviet chess players to Dutch tournaments (except for official Championship events), to cease sending our leading grandmasters to this country and to reduce our invitations to Dutch players to visit the USSR.

We ask your approval for this course of action.

On behalf of the Committee of Physical Culture and Sport of the Soviet of Ministries of the USSR, S. P. Pavlov, 15 December 1976.

Euwe's relations with the Soviet Union went through various changes. Before World War II, he was absolutely enthralled by the idea of Communism – as a society in which everyone shared equally. Incidentally, this point of view was held by a large segment of the Western intelligentsia at the time, and you may find offshoots of these ideas in correspondence which Euwe sent out of the USSR to Dutch newspapers during his first visit to the country in 1934. Very few people at that time succeeded in resisting the optical illusion, the regimented enthusiasm, or managed to avoid being distracted by the Big Show that was the Soviet Union of those days in its dealings with foreigners.

During the war Euwe took Russian lessons in Amsterdam from Karel van het Reve, later to become a famous Dutch writer and scholar of Sla-

vonian studies – which alone speaks volumes. During the opening ceremony of the Groningen tournament of 1946, Euwe and his daughters performed a Russian song, the first verse of which they remember to this day:

*Vast is my homeland!
Its forests, rivers and fields!
No other land do I know
Where humans can breathe so free.*

He may not have agreed with Goethe's observation that political songs are by necessity suspect, but you'd still wonder whether he fully understood what he was singing?

His enchantment with the Soviet Union vanished after his visit to Moscow in 1948, and it was not just his confidential conversations with pre-war friends Flohr and Keres that caused this change of heart. Of course, any Westerner would have had difficulty understanding the sheer depth of slavery then existing. But there were signs enough: furtive meetings, complete with warnings, such as when he met with Réti's widow, then living in Moscow; his constant scrutiny by the security agencies; and the whole atmosphere of persecution which surrounded a foreigner in those days in the Soviet Union.

Euwe told me that while in Moscow he asked Botvinnik: 'Well, where are X and Y?' whom he remembered from his pre-war visit to the USSR in 1934. 'They have shown themselves to be Enemies of the State', was the response. 'And how about Z?' persisted Euwe. 'He too', glowered the Patriarch.

Euwe's attitude toward the USSR changed forever after the events in Budapest in 1956. He was so shaken by them, in fact, that he intended to fly to Moscow, to the Kremlin itself, in order to explain to them that civilized people ought never, ever, to behave in this way.

After Euwe retired from his job and became President of FIDE, he grew closer to chess than ever, closer even than he had been during the period in his life when he tried to be a chess professional.

Boris Spassky was World Champion in 1969, and it was, in fact, he who nominated Euwe for the FIDE presidency, on behalf of the Soviet

federation and of a number of leading grandmasters. 'Of course, during my match against Fischer, Max indulged Fischer somewhat... well, I indulged him, too. Euwe was inclined toward compromise, especially when the Soviets started throwing tantrums – which they did a lot. During the negotiations for the Fischer-Karpov match, Max showed a moment of weakness. He should certainly not have disqualified Fischer, and he should have been a little tougher with the Soviets. I think he was getting a bit of revenge on Fischer – not for himself but for everyone, to punish him for his behaviour. It's no sinecure for a chess player to act as President of such a large federation: you get landed with a pile of complicated problems. But Euwe, of course, was the man for the job.'

In the political arena, the West had to deal with the Soviet Union as a superpower in those days. Euwe's position was all the more complex in that the Soviet Union was not just a chess superpower at the time – it was also the most powerful chessplaying country in the world. So when Euwe was elected President, he could not help but realise that the Soviets would play a decisive role in FIDE and that he would have to deal with them constantly. They were professional intriguers, grandmasters of manipulation and conspiracy, whereas Euwe regarded it as the FIDE President's primary goal to popularise the game itself. Often, when speaking about certain aspects of life in the Soviet Union, he would try to make a joke of it, but when he was among friends, Euwe never hid his negative view of Communism. As a realist and pragmatist, he always had to be ready to manoeuvre and compromise, sometimes even to close an eye. At times he failed to understand the Soviets, at times he was naive or simply refused to stoop to their mentality, infused as it was with the taint of ideology. In 1973, it was evident that the participation of the strongest Western grandmasters – Larsen and Hübner – in the Leningrad Interzonal was secured at the insistence of the Soviets and that Euwe lacked the firmness to oppose them. The Leningrad Interzonal, which was won by Kortchnoi and Karpov, was obviously stronger than the other one in Petropolis, with the result that Larsen and Hübner were eliminated from the struggle for the World Championship.

If you agree with the sad maxim that honest people will always lose out to dishonest people, because they believe the dishonest to be hon-

est, while the dishonest think the reverse and assume honest people to be like them – then he was doomed to fail from the start. But whenever matters of principle were discussed, Euwe stood like a rock.

In 1975, Euwe, as President of FIDE, placed the laurel wreath upon a new World Champion in Moscow. After Robert Fischer refused to defend his title, that Champion was now Anatoly Karpov. Even now, after more than twenty-five years, Karpov believes that Euwe simply had no choice but to follow the letter of the law, and that, regardless of what concessions he was granted, Fischer would never have given him a match. In Karpov's eyes, Euwe was an excellent FIDE President, although he did make one very serious error: 'There is no doubt that at that time he acted with the best of intentions, but the consequences of that error are still felt today. Euwe wanted to spread chess everywhere, even to the tiniest countries, to Third World nations on every continent. This wasn't a bad idea in itself, and as World Champion I supported him in this. But neither he nor I could have foreseen what this would lead to. He took as his motto: A Grandmaster In Every Country. This led not only to the inflation of the grandmaster title, but also to a leadership vacuum at the top of the chess world – in other words, to our current situation.'

Garry Kasparov believes that Euwe as President of FIDE was in some ways an idealist, but mostly a pragmatist – even though he proved unable, when the crunch finally came, to put a stop to Soviet aggression. 'I understand that the Soviets at that time were very powerful, but still. Today you would like to believe it would have been possible. If only because you'd prefer not to take such a deterministic view of history. It appears to me that, as FIDE President, he was unfortunately unable to foresee the dangers inherent to FIDE being virtually dominated by the Soviets – which is, in fact, what eventually happened.'

Viktor Kortchnoi remembers Euwe not only as one of the last honourable FIDE Presidents, but also as a man who did a lot for him personally after he settled in the West.

Yury Averbakh, a man who represented the Soviet Union on more than one occasion, met Euwe frequently at various meetings and FIDE Congresses. 'He was never hostile. He always sought to understand the opposing point of view, he was always trying to compromise. Such be-

haviour contrasted sharply to the behaviour of the Soviet delegation leaders, who were ready to press one line and one line only: the one that had been worked out beforehand. Of course, Euwe held staunchly to his opinion that Fischer must play a match for the World Championship, that he had to have that chance, regardless of the cost. For this, Max sometimes broke the rules. On this matter he even came into conflict with Botvinnik. But Max Euwe was undoubtedly the best President FIDE ever had!’

The culmination of Euwe’s chess career was indubitably his 1935 match against Alekhine. Had he not won it, and thereby become World Champion, Euwe’s name would now be grouped with those of Spielmann, Réti, Vidmar and other notable but not pre-eminent players of the pre-war era.

Before the match, practically everyone believed there could be only one outcome: Alekhine had to win. This was also the general view in the Soviet Union where, a year before the match, Euwe had participated in a tournament of Soviet masters and finished halfway the score table. This was Euwe’s first trip to the Soviet Union; in all, he was to visit the country over two dozen times.

Viktor Baturinsky, who would later rise to become one of the most influential chess functionaries in the Soviet Union, was a Young Komsomol member then, as well as a sports instructor. In that capacity, he was in Moscow, at the reception given in the Hotel Metropole in Euwe’s honour.

Baturinsky recalls: ‘At the very end of the dinner, the head of Soviet chess, Krylenko, asked Euwe what his chances were in his match against Alekhine. To which Euwe replied: ‘Honestly speaking, not very good. Alekhine is an extremely strong player and it goes without saying that beating him will be very difficult.’ ‘Well, what is the point of your challenge then?’ continued Krylenko. ‘First of all, it’s a very great honour for me to play a match for the World Championship, and secondly, my little country would like to have a national hero’, was Euwe’s reply.’

So Euwe approached his match with Alekhine in a mood best expressed by these lines from a poem by Rilke: *Wer spricht von Siegen? Überstehn ist alles.* (Who talks of victory? Survival is all that counts.)

Alexander Alekhine spent the last twenty-five years of his life as an emigré, mostly in France. But by education, manners and lifestyle he remained a Russian. Even though he wrote and spoke English, German and French, his thoughts found their most accurate and forthright expression in the books and articles he wrote in his native tongue. He wrote for his emigré compatriots, and the vast majority of readers is completely unaware of these articles, which were written for magazines and newspapers published mainly in Paris in the 1920s and '30s that are now bibliographical rarities. In these articles, he expressed himself with a great deal more frankness than in his German, French or English publications – here he was ‘among his own’.

Thus, two years before the match with Euwe, in an article for the magazine *Nasha Smena* (The Future Generation) about the playing style of the younger players – Euwe, Flohr, Kashdan, Pirc and Stoltz – Alekhine wrote: ‘Alas, one characteristic they share is a lack of originality. One can find nothing/whatsoever that is new in their games. All they have managed to do, to a greater or lesser extent, is to absorb absolutely anything of value from the ideas and writings of the top representatives of the two generations preceding them, and convert this knowledge into a fearsome practical weapon.’ Here he also passes an exceedingly chary judgment on Euwe’s chess writings, which he finds ‘useful in themselves, but mostly [they are] little more than well-intentioned and detailed collections of the latest achievements of opening theory: you will find no constructive thoughts in them.’

Some months before the start of the match, Alekhine wrote the following assessment of his prospective opponent and his chances in the forthcoming match in the Russian-language emigré paper *Poslednye Novosti* (The Latest News), published in Paris: ‘I first heard of Euwe after I left Soviet Russia in 1921 [...] His play, his youthful successes undoubtedly promised ‘something’; but that ‘something’ still fell short... After a relatively unsuccessful period in the early 1920s, the psychology of Euwe the practical player underwent its first, and perhaps most fundamental, change. If he did not consciously surmise it, then he felt instinctively that the kernel of his gift lay not within himself but outside of him. In other words, in contrast to Lasker, Capablanca, Nimzowitz and others of that class, he would not now and not ever learn from

himself, but would have to feed on other people's thoughts, other people's experiences, the fruits of other people's talents.'

Further on, however, he also writes: 'He has managed to master the most important quality – a strictly planned approach to the organisation of a chess game – and this helped him a great deal. [...] During my visit to Holland in late '25 he offered to play me in a ten-game series (there was no talk of a 'match' then) the following year, and by fortunate circumstance this event became a turning point in his career. This was because, first of all, it was in that year that the possibility of a match between Capablanca and me had finally taken concrete form, which meant that Euwe was no longer joining battle with an ordinary, albeit first-class, master but with a *Weltmeisterschaft* candidate.

As a result, the chess press, especially in Holland, blew the significance of this event out of all proportion. Secondly – and most importantly, of course – the outcome of this ten-game match, both competitively and qualitatively, was far from convincing: I won three games, lost two and drew five. There were several reasons for my relative failure, but chief among them certainly was my thoughtlessly and groundlessly underestimating my opponent. This was the moment that gave rise to Euwe's and Euwe's supporters' 'royal ambitions'.

'What could the possible outcome of our match be, assuming maximum technical preparation on the part of my opponent? The first (rather substantial) point to be examined is: Shall I be on the same optimum level of technical preparation as my adversary? In other words, shall I have worked out to the same extent a programme of openings, more or less unexpected by him, prepared especially for this match, and predicated on my adversary's style and knowledge as regards sequence and application? To this question, I must definitely answer in the negative, not because I have ever denied a measure of significance to the knowledge of openings and variations, but because I cannot, on the basis of my own experience, consider them to be the deciding factor in a protracted and important contest. [...] A second, and in my opinion more important, point is of a psychological nature and deserves to be looked at more closely. In the course of such a protracted contest, two factors will leave an imprint on the spirit of both players: firstly, the surroundings (the reaction of the audience and the so-called

'experts', the relationship with the local and international press, etc.), and, secondly, the influence of one's adversary's personality.

In a general psychological sense, Euwe's advantages are evident: firstly, any candidate possessing decent chances of gaining the title elicits the sporting sympathies of a significant part of the public at large, as well as the absolute sympathy of the press, which by its nature always seeks change, something new; secondly, Euwe is the hero of a little country which (unless I'm mistaken) has never had a champion, much less a World Champion. These two presumptions are enough to make Euwe the 'hero' of our match in the eyes of the press, regardless of whether he wins or loses.

Now, a few words about the second psychological factor – the influence of one's adversary's personality. Here I think I have a definite advantage. I do not believe in Euwe as a future World Champion. I don't believe that, even in the unlikely event of him defeating me, he would be acknowledged as indisputably the best player in the world.

If our contest should end in victory for him, it would only show that at that point I was not on top of my game; so much the worse for me. Should Euwe, on the other hand, formally become World Champion, he will be facing a difficult task – similar to the one facing me after I won my match against Capablanca: to show that, at this juncture, he, Euwe, is really the best.

'While hardly (*et pour cause*) wishing him to win this match, I do hope that he would, in the event, show himself to be a true World Champion.'

Euwe's victory took the chess world totally by surprise. A giant had been crushed – one who had, over the preceding decades, not only made them used to his never-ending victories, but to resounding and convincing ones, earned in such manner as to leave no doubt about who, at this juncture, was the strongest player in the world. After winning the match Euwe concluded his victory speech by saying: 'I fear I will not be World Champion for long.' I think these words bear witness more to his objectivity than to humility. Euwe doubtlessly understood what calibre of players he now moved amongst: Alekhine, whom he had dethroned, Capablanca – still very much around – and the new stars Botvinnik and Keres who were just emerging onto the world stage.

Whereas the West recovered fairly quickly from the shock of Alekhine's defeat, and the chess world took up a position of watchful anticipation, the Soviet Union executed a positive U-turn – which was, in fact, characteristic of that government's politics in general. In this country all that counted was reality, incontrovertible facts, and all that they believed in was strength. The country's history was subject to constant revision: heroes became traitors and sell-outs; more rarely, the reverse could happen. Alekhine, whom the Soviet press had denounced as a monarchist and White Guardist, was now also dethroned as a chess player, after losing the match to Euwe, while the new World Champion, by contrast, was elevated to hitherto undreamed-of heights.

Yakov Rokhlin, a well-known Soviet chess functionary, wrote after the match: 'Euwe underscores that representatives of the so-called combinative tendency often take too superficial a view of attuning attacking and defensive ideas. This crossing of the 'demarcation line' requires thorough preparation. This is not only necessitated by the current technical level of the art of chess, but also by the historical development of chess. [...] Let a few years elapse, and World Champion Euwe will give what is required and expected of him to the history of chess, viz. some top prizes at international tournaments. Then the whole dramatic episode of his struggle with Alekhine will seem dubious no longer. Chess players over the world, however, will long argue over who was the greater genius of the early century – the titanic Lasker, the intuitive Capablanca, the inspired Alekhine or the methodical Euwe.'

This is putting it rather strongly, of course. Euwe was no chess genius, but he was a genius of organisation, a genius of logic and order. The football coach's motto: 'Order beats class' explains many of Euwe's successes – first of all his victory in the World Championship match. But all these qualities are not enough to make a man World Champion.

Assessing his own chances of winning the World Championship, Polugaevsky wrote, in his day, that the thing he lacked – and that Fischer, Karpov and Kasparov possessed – was this pugnacity, this 'killer instinct' over the board. 'On the other hand', he suggested, 'neither Euwe, nor Smyslov, nor Petrosian had such crushing energy either.' This I find hard to subscribe to. All World Champions

Polugaevsky cites did have such energy, such aggression, during the period of their greatest achievements. Max Euwe too, beneath his absolute correctness, his upbringing, his manners and his command of many languages – all the things we take as part of Western civilisation – harboured this instinctive, aggressive machismo, the destructive psyche of the born fighter and battler. Without this thirst for victory, this inner certainty of superiority and the desire to demonstrate it, without such ambitions, it is impossible to win a match for the Championship of the World.

In the mid-1950s, long past the prime of his career, Euwe once found himself analysing some position with three leading Dutch players, in the course of which he gave Donner a ticking-off. Donner, defending himself, countered: 'But you also make mistakes sometimes.' To which Euwe replied: 'Yes, Hein, I do – but you should never forget that I understand chess better than the three of you put together.' Unusual words from Euwe. But this or a similar thought, left unsaid, unexpressed in words, was a feeling that was deeply ingrained in him. He retained these ambitions, this feeling – to show his superiority, to win! – well into his twilight years. This was evident even to young players who met him over the board, even in the last decade of his life. I felt it, too, when we played our match.

Two years after Euwe lost the 1937 match, the Soviet Union once again underwent a sharp reversal in its attitude to Max Euwe, by now already the former World Champion. Every chess publication now quoted Alekhine's words: 'I loaned Euwe the Champion's title for two years.'

Alekhine's defeat in the 1935 match was now explained by excessive indulgence in alcohol. Alekhine had previously been known to drink: sometimes before a game, sometimes during – as, for instance, during the Zurich 1934 tournament. Euwe himself believed that 'during the 1935 match, Alekhine was probably drinking before the 18th game (which was drawn), certainly before the 21st (which Alekhine lost), and before the 30th (which was drawn). [...] There may also have been other times, which I didn't notice', he wrote, 'but it's also quite possible that there were fewer cases, since Alekhine, despite his nearsightedness, adamantly refused to wear glasses, so that his hand tended to be

unsteady while making his moves. This might lead people to believe that he was drunk, when in fact he was as sober as a judge.'

Salo Flohr, himself a candidate for the World Championship at the time, aided Euwe during the match, although not as an official second. He later recalled that 'Alekhine explained after the match that he was looking for something to stimulate himself, especially before Game 15, when Euwe, after a very bad start when he was trailing 1:3, had suddenly tied the score at 7:7! Alekhine said that he was going to 'manoeuvre'; he had a glass to buck himself up and won. With this victory under his belt, he decided to press harder: he drank more, but this time he lost. So by the end of the match he was unable to decide what exactly his organism needed – did it need drink or not? Alekhine was absolutely sure that Euwe was not a dangerous opponent for him. At the start of the match, Alekhine was certain of victory. He said to me, sarcastically: 'Whom have you come to help? It's just bandages for the dead.''

One future World Champion, Vasily Smyslov, was fourteen when the first Alekhine-Euwe match took place. In his own life, this was a period of active study and much independent work, so he knows the games of the match very well and remembers them to this day. 'There are no accidents in life', Smyslov offers. 'Whatever form Alekhine happened to be in at that time, only a master of the highest class could have won a match against him. In that match Euwe played better – he won, which means he was destined to become World Champion. I think that there is no one in Holland who can match his chess successes – even for as chess-obsessed a country as they are.'

And for another World Champion, Boris Spassky, Euwe's victory over Alekhine was not dubious at all: 'He played better in that match – that's completely obvious. The fact that, even as a non-professional, he was able to defeat Alekhine at that time, should be seen as a sporting and creative deed of heroism. The quality of the games was pretty high, too. Beating Alekhine puts him into the constellation of chess apostles.'

Mikhail Botvinnik wrote an interesting characterisation of Max Euwe's style during the period when the man who was to become the first Soviet World Champion was only a Candidate. These notes from

Botvinnik's archives have only recently come to light: 'An exceptionally determined, active type of player. Even while defending, he always tries for active counterplay. He likes to play on the wings. He likes positions that are free of weaknesses, a bit freer; he likes to make troublesome long moves. He aims for development. In a favourable position he does not avoid exchanges and settles for the better endgame. He takes excellent advantage of others people's errors. When he has a material advantage (a pawn or the exchange), he plays with redoubled strength. A subtle, outstanding technician, but still capable of tricks.'

Anatoly Karpov himself analysed the games from the match that Euwe won, and very diligently, too: 'Of course, Alekhine was not on top of his form, but Euwe played very well. Remember also that at that time, there were no worthy candidates, because Bogoljubow, who played both previous matches, ingloriously lost both of them.'

Jan Timman compares the Euwe-Alekhine match with that of Karpov and Short in 1993: 'Before that match began, Karpov was also considered the favourite, but Short won, and deservedly so. He was a rising star then, he was a lot more motivated, and wanted very much to win – just as Euwe did in 1935. At that moment, Euwe was just playing better.'

Garry Kasparov believes that Euwe formed a link between Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine, on the one hand, and the new players Botvinnik, Keres, Fine and Reshevsky, on the other, making a sort of bridge between them. He brought a new element – research – into chess: 'The World Champion must move chess forward, and Euwe did so. Of course, it was not the sort of step that Alekhine made in his time, or let's say Botvinnik; but it was a step forward. All those theoretical duels, especially in the Slav Defence, showed that although Alekhine may have outstripped Euwe as a chess player in his general cultural level and in his ability to calculate variations, yet Euwe was the superior analyst, as the outcome of the match clearly demonstrated.

'As for Euwe the World Champion, there has always been a sort of deeply-held skepticism about this, but my analysis of his first match with Alekhine shows that Euwe deserved it – one does not win the title of World Champion that easily!

'In the second match, in 1937, Euwe laboured under a sort of pre-

monition of doom, yet from the quality of play shown by Alekhine it is clear that Euwe could have stood toe-to-toe with him if he had been properly prepared. It seems to me that, had Euwe taken better care of his title, the outcome of the 1937 revenge match might well have been different.

‘I also think that Euwe allowed himself to be affected by the opinion bandied about by many people at the time, that his had been an accidental victory, and this had a negative effect on his mindset. Of course, he would have had no chance against Botvinnik, or Keres, of the new generation, but it seems to me that he could have given Alekhine quite a struggle. For he was a very good calculator, as well as a sharp and interesting player. You can also see this in his later games – such as those against Geller and Najdorf at the 1953 Candidates’ tournament. Against Najdorf he played an intuitive attack of a type later associated with Tal – very beautiful. I think his contribution to the development of chess has been woefully underappreciated.

‘He was without doubt one of the least controversial figures in the history of the World Championship. I cannot say anything about Steinitz, but as regards the rest, I can see only three who were wholly without blemish – three Champions who stand alone: Lasker, Euwe and Tal.’

The main reason for Euwe’s loss of the second match was probably his attitude: Well, I’ve got the World Champion’s title. I’ve fulfilled the hopes of those who believed in me and helped me. That barrier has been taken; now, life goes on. It was this attitude that foreordained his loss, not the holes in his preparation or that Alekhine’s uncertain play in the tournaments after 1935 had lulled Euwe into a false sense of security, which is how Euwe explained his loss later on. The idea of spending forever demonstrating his chess superiority and pushing all other aspects of life into the background, was completely uninviting to Euwe. He had none of the qualities – or perhaps shortcomings – necessary for a lengthy reign as World Champion.

Among the geniuses and philosophers, fanatics and supermen that can be easily distinguished among the World Champions, Max Euwe stands out for his humility, his ordinariness; he leaves one with the impression that what he did could have been done by almost anyone.

I think that, regarding chess, one might say of Euwe what was said of Flaubert in his time: that his mastery was not of the obvious sort. You might think that anyone could write like him, but for some reason, nobody does.

I believe that one could divide all the World Champions of this century, beginning with Alekhine, into three categories. Into the first category I would place Alekhine and Fischer. For all the differences between these two geniuses of chess (one graduated from one of the most prestigious educational institutions in St Petersburg and defended his dissertation at the Sorbonne, while the other never finished school), they have a lot in common. For both Alekhine and Fischer, chess, and their superiority in it, defined the very core of existence. Self-expression through chess, and the obligatory victory in it, became for them the point of their whole life. The things outside of chess that made up their lives were for them secondary in nature and felt contradictory and inconstant to them. Life itself seemed to be something playing itself out in the background.

The second group includes all the World Champions of the second half of the century born and bred in the Soviet Union. The reason is not that at various periods of their lives they played under the hammer and sickle flag, and received stipends from the USSR Sports Committee. The point is that, for certain periods – and for some of them, all of their lives – they were governed by the rules of play, concepts and norms obtaining in the Soviet Union. And this unites them all, regardless of whether they were genuine Soviet types, such as Botvinnik, or religious, like Smyslov; whether they attempted to live life in an airless space, like Tal, or conformed, like Petrosian, attempting to extract all the benefit he could for himself and the people of his small circle; whether they were pragmatists first and last, elevated to be a symbol of the system, like Karpov, or later became outspoken critics of it, like Spassky or Kasparov.

The third category of World Champions consists of just one man – Max Euwe. He was the only true representative of the West, with all its values, principles and moral categories, formed in his youth and still unchanged in his eighth decade.

All my first chess successes after I settled in Holland are connected, one way or another, with Euwe. I became an International Master in

1974. It was my first experience playing for the national team at the Olympiad in Nice, and I fulfilled the IM norm before the event was over. Euwe, who was President of FIDE at the time, approached me as soon as that game had concluded. 'Officially, the committees have all completed their work, but if you fill out this application for title recognition, we can probably get something done.' And this happened.

In January 1975, when I played in the Wijk aan Zee tournament, he was asked to comment on the most interesting game of the round, for the benefit of the spectators. He chose my game against Browne, and when it was over, we spent a lot of time analysing some head-spinning variations. He was 73 years old by then, but analytically – especially when the position was sharp and combinative – his eye was still keen. A few days later he congratulated me, also at Wijk aan Zee, for fulfilling my first GM norm.

On June 12, 1975, Euwe and I each gave a simultaneous display in Groningen. I remember that day especially well: the Professor had just returned from Tallinn, where on June 10th he had attended the funeral of Paul Keres, his friend and opponent from pre-war times.

The simul was a difficult one. We played in the student club, and the youngsters, with their then fashionable long hair, were busily pouring tobacco into papers and casually licking the package into real cigarettes. These kids subscribed to no one's authority – they played the Benko Gambit, snatching the first opportunity to whip a knight onto d3. Many would follow their move by reaching out a hand to a non-existent chess clock, betraying themselves as experienced tournament players. In a word, this was a tough simul, and Euwe, 74 years old, obviously found it a lot harder than me.

Once aboard the train back to Amsterdam, he immediately opened the briefcase that was his constant companion, and withdrew a pile of documents, burying himself in reading and occasionally making notes. 'In a few days', he explained, seeing a question in my eyes, 'the FIDE Executive Committee will meet and I must get all this in order.'

I would call him Professor; he called me Mr Sosonko, or Genna, depending on circumstances. It goes without saying that it never entered my head to address him by his first name, even though I once heard a still quite young John Van der Wiel call him 'Max'. 'If anything, he

likes it', John explained, when he saw my astonishment. 'And you do get tired of all this 'Mr Euwe' here and 'Mr Euwe' there.'

It was late in the evening by now, yet Euwe didn't look tired at all. On the contrary, he looked very satisfied: the chess event in Groningen had gone well, he was on his way home, he could write, he could work, no time was being wasted, the train was moving, and he could write, no time was being wasted, the train was moving, and he could work...

When we were nearing Amersfoort, he looked at his watch and began to discuss something with the conductor: 'The train's running late, and I'm afraid that my wife, whom I called from Groningen, won't wait for me and go home', he explained. 'So what, Professor', I incautiously replied, 'than you can just take a taxi.' Euwe looked at me thoughtfully. 'The number 4 tram goes right to my door, Mr Sosonko.' The number 4 tram in Amsterdam still travels the same route today, and to get from his stop to the home on the Mensinge, where he lived at that time, was still a stiff walk...

Before the match against Alekhine, little Elsje Euwe was asked in school: 'What will happen if your Daddy becomes World Champion?' 'Then we'll have chicken for dinner that night', the child replied.

After winning the match, Euwe reply to Flohr's proposal to spend a month on the French Riviera, was, 'I haven't so much as a nickel to spare for the ride to the station.' After winning the last match game in 1935 he had no money for a taxi, and the tram wasn't running because of the heavy snowfall, so he went home on foot. Forty years on, the Professor could easily have afforded a taxi ride, of course, but it wasn't a question of money. Calling him 'stingy' would be missing the point. 'Economical' or 'thrifty' would have been closer to it, but I feel these adjectives also fail to reflect the truth of the matter. His almost ascetic lifestyle was not a product of lack of material goods – in the latter decades of his life, he could afford to buy many things – but of his upbringing and of his inner reliance on an almost total independence from his surroundings. Here, the Calvinist society in which he grew up played a role, as did the modest family life of an Amsterdam school-teacher – a whole complex of things for which the best possible translation would be the Dutch word *fatsoen*, meaning, roughly, common decency and all that pertains to it.

He was always very unpretentiously but impeccably dressed. These matters interested him as little as what he ate: thinking about it would have distracted him from his many responsibilities. He never went to a restaurant, usually finishing dinner in half an hour, after which he would retire to his room. Els Euwe recalls: 'We ate at eight, at one and at six in the evening, with a glass of milk later on. During dinner, Daddy always listened to the news on the radio. If he watched some empty-headed serial on TV, he would generally be doing something else at the same time. Often both the radio and TV would be on, and he'd be listening and watching simultaneously. He was often travelling, but his accommodation on those trips were always Spartan. He shrank from the smallest extra comfort – he never took a sleeping car on the train.'

He never kept a diary, but he would keep accurate records of every expense in a special notebook. A few of these remain in the Max Euwe Centre in Amsterdam, but the Income and Expense lines are filled with the analysis of chess games, in his small, firm handwriting.

By nature he was first of all a tactician, yet Karpov, who once made a study of the games of World Champions with a view to putting together a book on queen sacrifices, said that he had not been able to find any example of them in Euwe's games.

Krogius, in his own analysis of Euwe's games, wrote that he had 'a clearly exaggerated respect for material. Indeed, many of Euwe's errors – and not all of them in the opening – came from over-emphasising the importance of the material factor.'

Was this a reflection of his approach to life? Not entirely. Even when his only source of income was his salary as a teacher of mathematics in a girls' high school, he was always taking in guests. Smyslov still recalls three notable days he spent in Amsterdam, staying with Keres in Euwe's home after some tournament. As a rule, the money for his numerous trips around the world as FIDE President came from the Euwe Fund, which he himself underwrote with simul, lectures and demonstration games.

After a difficult simul he might make his way home on an Amsterdam tram, but the next day he might spend a large sum, with no regrets, on something he considered right and useful.

At the end of the 1970s a committee was formed to assist Jan Timman in his quest for the World Championship of which Euwe became a member. He supported the committee personally, paying considerable sums out of his own pocket, while studiously avoiding getting any credit for it, with no noise or folderol.

It seems to me that, besides his immediate assistance, he also wanted to continue the tradition of the Euwe Committee, which had secured assistance for him fifty years before and organised the match for the World Championship: they helped me then, now it's my turn to help them.

In his view of the world, this was a duty – a key term, I think, for understanding the essence of Euwe – and a proper one in every sense: for Timman, for chess, and for his country. And this last word was no empty phrase to Euwe. His daughters remember that the only time they ever saw their father cry was on May 15th, 1940: 'We were not yet in school. Our father sat on the chair, being shaved by the barber who usually came in the morning. The radio was on and Father had just heard that we had surrendered to the Germans.'

He never went to museums and almost never read – there simply wasn't time. Once he took a few mindless paperbacks with him on a holiday, read them quickly and spent the rest of the time spinning with idleness. He had perfect pitch and loved classical music – Beethoven, Chopin – but he never went to the Concertgebouw, because that would have required time. Music was a background sort of thing for him, something to enjoy while doing something else.

Caroline Euwe recalls: 'He always went to bed at half past ten, after listening to the late news on the radio. He hated disorder more than anything else in the world. He would plan everything: vacations, free time. And he would make schedules for my mother of what to do and when and how to do it. Everything always had to be in order and in its proper place. He got angry when we brought home poor marks from school. And he'd get angry again when he sat down to work and I played football with the boys under his window.'

Describing Jan Timman's father, mathematics professor Rein Timman, Euwe wrote: 'I have known many professors, but only the rarest of them combined deep professorial knowledge with such out-

standing characteristics as objectivity, humility and modesty.' This, of course, was Euwe himself. What was characteristic of him was also what he valued in others: objectivity, modesty and restraint.

The self-absorption and self-castigation common to many chess players were completely alien to him. The first half of the World Championship tournament of 1948, which went poorly for him, took place in The Hague. Returning home to Amsterdam, he usually sat in the back seat of the car with Carel van den Berg, his assistant for this event. Analysing a position on his pocket set, he announced: 'I've got to resign, this position is lost' – and immediately began talking about other things, as though chess had completely ceased to exist.

Smyslov recalls: 'Max Euwe was a genial sort. Although our games generally did not turn out well for him and he often suffered from bad luck, I was constantly amazed by his absolutely correct behaviour after the game and during the postmortem analysis. At Groningen 1946, Euwe played very well, but Botvinnik was very lucky – he found a draw in the adjourned position of his game against Euwe, even though it seemed to all that he was lost. We had dinner together and Mikhail Moiseevich spent the whole time analysing the position on his pocket set; he was very nervous...'

Botvinnik has asserted that there was a time when his relationship with Euwe was quite difficult. I find that hard to believe; Euwe himself would probably have been surprised to learn of it. He himself had, at any rate, no difficult relationship with Botvinnik. His friend and second, Hans Kmoch, wrote at the time that Euwe was never happier than when he could make someone happy.

Jan Timman was scarcely twelve when he played his first game against Euwe, in a simul given at the Hague in 1963. The game, a Stonewall Variation of the Dutch Defence, developed along interesting lines and eventually ended in a draw. Jan recalls: 'I sat next to my older brother Ton, who got an advantage out of the opening and offered a draw. Euwe smiled, and said: 'No. It will be a while before you will have another chance to play me.' Ton eventually won. Typical Euwe: comradely, giving a youngster confidence with a gesture, when the outcome of the game was unimportant – it was as if he placed himself in the background.'

He could speak the major European languages. His strongest point was German, the chess player's international language before World War II. Already getting on in years, he began to take lessons in Spanish. I remember a speech he gave, in Spanish, at the opening of the Buenos Aires Olympiad in 1978. Russian proved harder for him. Although he was a frequent visitor to the Soviet Union and tried hard to learn the language, his knowledge was limited to a few phrases. I heard some of them at the close of the Biel Interzonal in 1976. With the help of these, and some cobbled-together English and German words, Euwe carried on a half-mimed conversation with Geller and Petrosian. But when the latter, overjoyed at the opportunity to converse without their interpreter, exceeded Euwe's conversational speed limit – a common error of people who speak only one language – the Professor could only exclaim *Da! Da!*, and nod pleasantly at whatever was being said.

In his younger days, Euwe would spend Sundays playing football, boxing and swimming. Els Euwe remembers: 'My father played table tennis frequently, preferring a defensive strategy. He would often retrieve the hardest-hit balls, beating players who were stronger than him. He decided to learn how to fly a plane, and we, his children, would stand, bursting with pride, when he did loop-the-loops over our house. Fortunately, he failed the final exam, so he never got his pilot's licence. Just as well, since he would doubtlessly have been called up, and almost all the pilots got shot down on the first day of the war.'

When Euwe was asked which was the greatest day of his life, he replied: 'The day in 1964 when I made professor.' These words touched off a furor in the chess community – how could this be? How could a World Champion whose name is known to millions consider some other unimportant fact to be more significant? A fact, moreover, that appears as only a short one-line entry in any chess encyclopedia. Yet I feel that Euwe said what he truly believed: it was not his style to put people on. Nor was he an eccentric or unaware of the significance of his achievement. The examples of Newton – who considered the greatest accomplishment of his life to have been his *Notes on the Book of the Prophet Daniel* – or Wagner – who valued his poetry higher than his music – are inappropriate here. Of course, Euwe fully understood that there are thousands of mathematics professors, but only one World

Chess Champion. His statement speaks, first and foremost, of the position he assigned to chess on the scale of human values – a scale whose measures he set himself.

Lasker's words from the beginning of the century define Euwe's relationship to the game and to chess professionalism, and apply directly to his case: '... and such uncertain professions also include that of the tournament chess player. One can hardly call it a profession in the full sense of that word, inasmuch as it fails to provide a stable income sufficient to support a family. But... it does bring fame. And poverty is more easily borne when one can consider oneself unique. Fame may also be employed in the business world, where it sometimes gives one the opportunity to choose other employment, such as that of tax agent or teacher, or may give one the possibility of obtaining a recommendation for easy work at an acceptable salary.'

In the Roman world view, only civic jobs held the stature of *negotium*; all other employment was leisure, or *otium*. In Western Europe, in the 1920s and '30s, these two Roman concepts nearly dovetailed with society's distinction between a real profession and that of chess player. Interestingly, at the same time in the Soviet Union, professionalism in chess, which would become a common occurrence in the latter half of the century, was still quite a novel concept. Misha Botvinnik, then a young student, recalled the bitter pill he had to swallow when he returned to the Polytechnic Institute after his match against Flohr in 1933. 'All the students had finished their dissertations, except two: one had been sick, and the other had been called away for 'a social amusement' – as the director put it. At that time also, a humorous couplet circulated around the technical school concerning Alexander Kotov, the future grandmaster. It read: 'There's no need to be a Maestro, but you must become an engineer!'

The game was popular enough, even in Tsarist Russia: the St Petersburg tournaments of 1909 and 1914 were significant events. The presence of Lasker, Capablanca and other leading grandmasters of the age filled the halls with spectators – even though, just as everywhere else in Western Europe, chess in Russia was primarily a game for the higher echelons of society. But there is more than long tradition to explain the



After his tour of the Dutch Indies maths teacher Euwe is welcomed by his pupils of the Grammar School for Girls (1930).

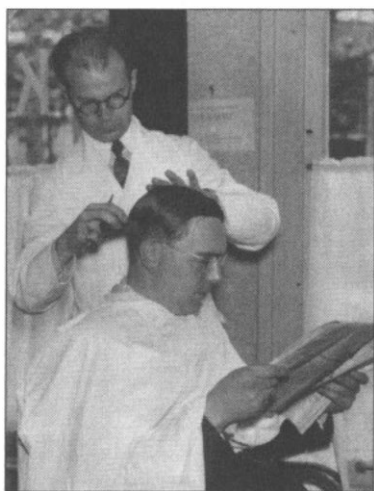


The match for the world title, 1935.

Left to right: Alekhine, Van Harten, Maroczy, Landau, Knoch en Euwe.



The World Champion during his first flying lessons at Schiphol Airport.



During the 1937 match: 'No time was being wasted.'



Euwe and his three young daughters ...



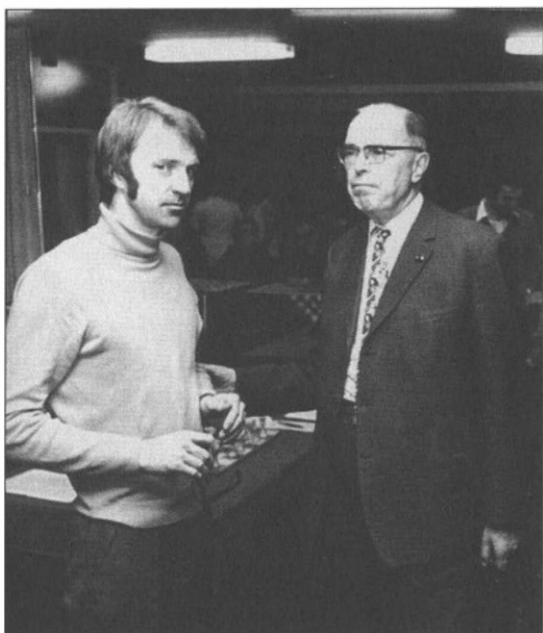
... and with wife and grown-up daughters in the '50s.



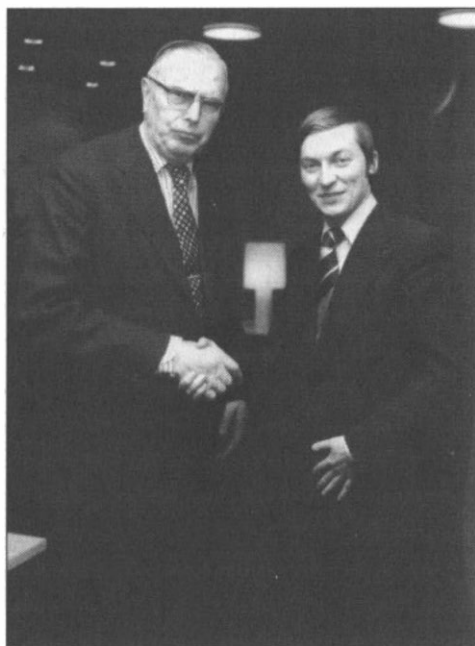
Bladel 1969. With Salo Flohr, Hans Müller and Karel Opocensky.



As FIDE-president
with secretary Ineke
Bakker and United
States representative
Edmondson.



With Fridrik Olafsson, his successor as FIDE president.



The FIDE president with the
new World Champion
Anatoly Karpov, 1976.



Hoogovens Tournament 1973. In the company of the Russian ambassador in the Netherlands Romanov, and Mikhail Tal.



Genna Sosonko congratulates Max Euwe on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

great interest in chess in the Soviet Union. 'What else is there for them to do?' replied Alekhine, after he emigrated to the West, when asked in the 1920s about the reasons for the popularity of chess in the USSR. The isolation of the Soviet Union from the other nations of Europe, the energy of the masses that required an outlet, the support on the very highest level – all these factors gave rise to a phenomenon that lasted for decades: Soviet chess. Chess became a political instrument, utilised to show the entire world the superiority of the Socialist system: The very first Soviet championship, won by Alekhine, was held in Russia three years after the establishment of Soviet rule.

In the 1920s and '30s, along with the strongest possible international events, the Soviet Union also held hundreds of events on every kind of level. The strength of the Soviet masters started by matching the level of the strongest Western players and ended by surpassing it. 'Chess is the gymnastics of the mind.' – V. I. Lenin. Thus read the banner that hung in every chess club in the Soviet Union. It did not matter that Lenin, who genuinely loved chess and played it when abroad in exile, never actually spoke these words; it made an impressive motto, and did a lot to popularise the game in the Soviet state. 'Chess is in no way inferior to playing the violin', affirmed Mikhail Botvinnik, the acknowledged leader of Soviet chess. Western professionals who played in the Moscow international tournaments of 1925, 1935 and 1936 called the Soviet Union a chess El Dorado. The crowds of fans, thirsting for a glimpse of the masters playing in the finest halls in Moscow, could hardly be restrained by mounted policemen. The only comparable phenomenon in the West was show business; there, chess players generally stewed in smoky cafes, and the profession of 'chess player' would only elicit a quizzical raising of eyebrows.

The actual professionalisation of chess in the Soviet Union did not start until after World War II. This saw the emergence of a new breed of young Soviet grandmasters, strong and seasoned professionals whose level of play was so high that in the post-war Olympiads – the team championships of the world – the only question was how many points would separate the Soviet team, in first place, from whoever came second. The result of the Buenos Aires Olympiad in 1978, when the Hungarian team managed to relegate the Soviet team to second place, was

considered practically the worst disaster in the entire history of Soviet chess.

Meanwhile, the process of professionalisation of chess was being taken up by other countries as well. Along with Eastern European teams, the strongest teams in Western Europe and the United States were wholly made up of professional players. Although chess had changed drastically before his eyes, Euwe's opinion of chess as a profession remained unchanged right up to the end. Here's what he wrote to his student, Anneke Timman, on the occasion of the death of her husband, Jan Timman's father, in 1975: 'I approve of Jan's decision to abandon chess as a profession and spend the bulk of his time in future on his university studies, and I am very happy for him and for your whole family. Of course, chess will remain a part of his life, along with his main profession, but he will have a far more serious attitude toward it than he did before. I regard his intention as most laudable: this will be an honourable action, a tribute to his father's memory. I am pleased with his decision – this will be a most fortunate turning point in Jan's career, of which chess shall ever remain a part.'

It was precisely this attitude toward the game that I believe explains Euwe's decision, in the early 1950s, to give up professional chess for good – more than the aphorism that whatever we cease to succeed at, ceases to attract us.

The period in which Euwe led the life of a chess professional was a difficult one for him. The simultaneous exhibitions, often played in the smoky rooms of some public house, and his material dependence on chess, were not only difficult for him psychologically, but also sapped his general sense of well-being. At the time of the tournament in Switzerland, his daughters constantly had to press ice to his temples, and Taimanov remembers how, during the Candidates' tournament in 1953, his wife was constantly massaging his head, while his opponent was considering his next move. Taimanov said: 'At that Candidates' tournament of 1953, Euwe played no worse than the others; but I think he found playing tougher, more difficult, than the others.' But he did win from me, even though I was only half his age. The variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defence we played in our game had been thoroughly analysed by myself and Flohr – or so we thought. Euwe refuted this analysis and won an important theoretical dispute.'

'We only had enough of everything after Father became a professor,' recalls Els Euwe. 'There was money in the house, which pleased him very much. He would say to his wife, 'Go ahead and buy yourself a fur coat.' He liked telling her that a lot. Once, in the airport, we were in the VIP salon, and he was obviously enjoying being there, just as he enjoyed, at the end of his life, a nice, spacious apartment with lots of room and central heating.'

This last period of his life coincided with the appearance and further growth of a society of material prosperity and the rejection of conventional values in Western Europe, and above all in Holland. Comparing the serious, concentrated face of Max the schoolboy and student with the often smiling visage in the photographs taken in the latter years of his life, one cannot help thinking that he was born old and wise, and grew younger. With age, he became gentler and more expansive. And those close to him knew that behind the facade shown to all, behind the costume of the modest shirt and the severe tie, there lay hidden an emotional man, who reacted to the joys and pleasures of life, which he had either failed to notice before or had consciously renounced. He no longer had to tie himself to the mast, like Odysseus – he had given life more than he had taken from it, and wasn't it time to think of himself, at last?

In the last year of his life, Els Euwe took a cruise with him. Among the books taken along by his daughter, he noticed a brochure on stress, and decided to read it. 'Else', he said, 'I don't understand what this is – I have never suffered from stress.' On the same occasion he also said to her: 'I see you talking to all kinds of persons here. I wouldn't for the life of me know what to say to all these people.' He was accustomed either to speak to or in the presence of many people at once: in front of a class, in the student auditorium, at a FIDE Congress, or to open an Olympiad. And each such discussion, appearance or speech had some sort of goal in mind. Who knows whether this constant occupation, these various matters and obligations, this tightly-wound spring of a life, might be explained by his not knowing what to say when it was just one-on-one, with the most difficult conversation partner of all – himself.

I am sure he did not have a very good time on that cruise. The lack of space forced him into activities that were alien to him – more importantly, they lacked all sense or point for him. Conversations at the

bar or with his table-companion, when the subject of your conversation is forgotten the next minute, changing for dinner – after all, the whole point of a cruise is the Cult of Food, All Possible Amusements and Diversions, Watching the Evening Show, and the Short Tourist Dash Ashore, whenever the boat puts into harbour. Or something more senseless still: watching the clouds roll by and listening to the water lapping against the ship, as you lie on a blanket in your chaise lounge and do absolutely nothing, nothing at all.

I never regarded him as a historical object and even less as a subject for literature, perhaps because whenever I talked to him about the past, he would quickly steer the conversation back to the present or the immediate future. Euwe was first and foremost a man of action, not of philosophy. And whatever he did, he strove to do the best he knew how. The words of the Amsterdam sage Spinoza apply directly to him: 'The more perfect in its nature something is, the better it works, and the less damage it suffers. The reverse is also true: the better something works, the more perfect it is.'

Euwe was not a believer. His wife was very religious, and he probably felt that she was responsible for this aspect of their lives. I recall his widow, while accepting condolences after his cremation, replying with firm assurance: 'I do not doubt that I shall see Max again.' In his conception of an orderly universe and what was important in the life of a man, the starring role was allotted to time. This was the only god he acknowledged.

In his view, the greatest sin in life was the less-than-optimal utilisation of life, given only once. One might apply the words of Einstein: 'If I knew that I must die in three hours' time, it would make no great impression on me. I would try to think of the best way to make use of those three hours.' You could say the same things about Euwe. He worked constantly: at his writing desk, at the chessboard, behind the auditorium lectern, while airborne, on the train, even in the carriage that carried him to his own wedding. Rodin's motto: *Toujours Travailler* (Always working) was also his – or, perhaps better, Kant's 'Work is the best way to enjoy life'. The term 'workaholic' would have fitted him perfectly if it had been invented then. Hans Kmoch said of him: 'Euwe can only breathe freely when he is smothered in work.'

Returning home from abroad, his first order of business, even before taking off his coat, was always to go to his writing desk and sort through his accumulated correspondence. He always replied to letters on the same day and felt very bad when his occasional journeys made this impossible. There can be no doubt that this new age, with its technical possibilities, would have appealed to him very much.

Whenever he overcame one barrier in his life – whether it was winning the national championship, attaining the grandmaster title, the World Championship or the professorship – he was always aiming for the next one, believing that what was already achieved was now in the past. When he moved into his new apartment, he took with him not a single clipping or article about his past successes – that was all in his past. I don't think he thought of these barriers as concrete goals he set for himself. He merely followed the tried and true formula: *Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra* (Do what you must, and what will be, will be). His whole lifestyle is aptly described in the Book of the Tao, in which the way, not the goal, creates the sense in one's life.

These philosophical attempts to make sense of his life would probably have made the Professor smile. More than likely, he would have clapped me on the shoulder, looked at his watch, and said something like: There's a FIDE Congress coming up soon. This was a mathematician's view of life (for he was one), an attitude that said: We needn't be amazed at this world, just live in it – which he did.

In May 1981, Euwe turned eighty. He looked great: tanned, smiling, with a carnation in his buttonhole, Euwe accepted congratulations at a reception held in the Amsterdam Carlton Hotel. Little did anyone think that the time to complete his biography by adding the year of his death to that of his birth was drawing near. Yet this unfortunate necessity arose just six months later – while he had still so many plans. It's a well-known fact that truly healthy people not only don't think about death, but live and act as though they are, in fact, immortal.

His pocket set was always set up with positions from the national correspondence championship, which he was forever analysing. Euwe intended to play in the World Correspondence Championship – a tournament that generally lasts for several years. 'Watch me', he told Averbakh, six months before he died, 'I will yet become Correspon-

dence World Champion!’ He didn’t make the slightest concession to his age; he was sure that he would live to be a hundred. Despite his advanced years, he did not give us a lesson in aging, and he died not yet full of days.

Early in November, Euwe set off for Israel on a visit to the Dead Sea. His trip was a difficult one: he flew out of Basel, whence he had arrived from Rotterdam, after a difficult simultaneous exhibition, with the night train – and, as usual, he hadn’t taken a sleeping car. On his second day at the Dead Sea he suffered a heart attack. When he recovered, after a few days, the first thing he asked for was a chess set. The doctors insisted that he stay in the hospital for at least a week. ‘If the doctors say a week, that means that you can fly home in two days’, said Euwe. Permission was given, but only on condition that, upon returning to Holland, he would put himself immediately into a doctor’s care.

Upon returning to Amsterdam, he immediately set to work, but the doctors insisted that he be hospitalised, as he needed serious cardiac surgery. He did not lose optimism and hoped to be on his feet again soon: the World Computer Championship was starting and he had promised to participate. Before the operation he said: ‘My greatest desire now is to sit under an apple tree and do nothing. Nothing; just to sit under an apple tree...’

A Born Optimist

On the occasion of Jan Timman's 50th birthday

Jan Timman belongs to a generation that boasts numerous famous names. Born in the early 1950s, they dominated tournaments in the 1970s and '80s, and Jan Timman can look back on the past with pride: he stood almost at the pinnacle of the enormous chess pyramid.

I have played more games against him than against anyone else in the world. We have spent long months together in various cities and countries, playing in Olympiads, European Championships and international tournaments. I was his best man when he got married. For almost three decades now we have been living in Amsterdam with only a fifteen-minute walk dividing us. This makes it difficult to write about him: when you get used to someone, you involuntarily cease to pay attention to his character traits, his way of speaking, his habits and idiosyncracies, which are much more noticeable to those who only see him once in a while. All the same, I will give it a try.

Jan Hendrik Timman was born on 14th December 1951 in Delft, where his father was a professor of mathematics at the university.

Their home was a very open one, and this reflected on the upbringing of the children, three sons and a daughter, who grew up without any prohibitions or restrictions. Jan was eight years old when his older brother, Ton, taught him to play chess. Until then, Jan had only been interested in draughts, but now Ton showed him this other game. His brother became quite a decent player – of candidate-master strength – but he gave up the game many years ago, whereas Jan became junior champion of Holland at fourteen and finished third in the World Junior Championship a year later.

During this period he studied with chess master Hans Bouwmeester. The concept of a chess trainer did not exist in Holland in that time, and Timman simply went to Bouwmeester's house every Saturday, where they would look at the classics – Rubinstein's endgames, Botvinnik's games – and analyse. But this wasn't the main thing: Bouwmeester taught Jan how to study on his own. This period lasted for a year and a

half. Bouwmeester recalls that even then Timman distinguished himself by an excellent positional feeling, a rare capacity for work and a love of analysis.

After Jan had finished school, the question arose: what next? His parents wanted him to continue his studies, and Timman enrolled in the Faculty of Mathematics at Amsterdam University. He even sat through the first hour of some lecture, but that was enough for him. A few years later and already a grandmaster, he said, after the premature death of his father, that he wanted to take up the study of mathematics again – without giving up chess. But this was most probably a fit of emotion: chess had already taken over his life.

Timman's young years coincided with the time of the hippies, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the student revolts in Paris and Amsterdam, the sexual revolution and complete freedom. All this could not fail to affect chess, and Dutch players had the reputation of being most reckless and long-haired individuals who paid absolutely no attention to their appearance: threadbare jeans, worn-down shoes and old sweat shirts – that was their uniform.

I first saw Jan in December 1972 in the little Dutch town of Wageningen, which was then the location of the editorial office of the magazine *Schaakbulletin*, the predecessor of *New In Chess Magazine*, of which he is now the editor-in-chief. A good-looking, very thin and beardless youth with hair down to his shoulders, in old jeans and a frayed velvet jacket, he had just returned from the chess heaven of those times – Yugoslavia, where one could play in tournaments virtually the whole year round. Despite the fact that he had the temerity to smoke and deftly rolled his own cigarettes, his appearance was quite feminine: at the age of seventeen, when he was playing in a tournament in Vilnius, someone took him for a girl and asked him to dance.

The career of chess professional chosen by Timman entailed endless trips chasing tournaments and a perennial lack of money, but also a life that was lively, carefree and full of adventure. There was usually three of them travelling together: Jan, Hans Böhm and – at the wheel of a small minibus – their companion from Rotterdam, a weakish player but a devoted friend and supporter of them both. They also slept in this minibus, although once, before the Christmas tournament in Stock-

holm in 1971, they were warned that a very cold snap had been forecast and that they were in danger of freezing. The friends were forced to stay in a hotel, but in order to be able to pay for their accommodation, Jan would have to take first prize in the tournament – which he duly did, beating Browne in the last round. He was at the age, then, when the wind of fortune blows almost constantly, but in contrast to many others he knew when and how to hoist the sail. But to Timman, the monetary rewards of a prize-winning place in a tournament, the title of international master, winning the Dutch championship or even the grandmaster title, were additional benefits that interested him only up to a point. His main motivation was striving for improvement, love of the game, a desire to play against the names he met only in the top places of the strongest tournaments in the world, and a resolve to reach the very pinnacle of chess.

This resolve has accompanied him throughout his chess career, a career in which brilliant peaks have alternated with serious troughs. A decade and a half ago, when he was already a recognised grandmaster of world class, Timman wrote, after losing his World Championship Candidates' semifinal match to Artur Yusupov: 'In 1985 I reached a height which previously had seemed unattainable. The sudden end does not signify that this is the limit of my possibilities. Even if I had to negotiate a roaring waterfall in a wooden tub with natives armed to the teeth below me, I will continue fighting.' And continue fighting he did, playing in the Candidates' matches for the World Championship again and again.

A list of Timman's successes during all those years would run into several pages, and his career is not yet at an end. Nine-time champion of Holland, winner of many elite international tournaments and a regular participant in Candidates' tournaments and World Championship matches, Jan Timman was regarded as the strongest Western player in the mid-1980s, occupying second place in the world rating list.

Although brought up on the games of Botvinnik, he himself considers the ideal style to be that of another World Champion – Smyslov: original strategy, clarity of play and virtuoso conduct of the endgame. These three qualities also largely typify his own play, yet the outstanding characteristic of his games is dynamics; he reacts instantly to any change in the situation on the board, and it is no accident that Karpov

has called him a great master of the counterattack, of playing to seize the initiative, for which Timman has a very subtle sense.

Jan's style and manner of play are similar to those of one of his contemporaries, Rafael Vaganian, but in some ways he is tougher, more severe, more professional: suffice it to say that when they played each other, Timman won the first seven games. There is another player who was born in the same year and with whom Timman has spent hundreds of hours at the board – Karpov; and although the overall score hugely favours the former World Champion, Timman has defeated him ten times.

During all these years, Holland regarded Jan Timman as the natural successor to Max Euwe, and in 1979 a special Timman committee was set up, aimed at helping Jan in his fight for the World Championship. Euwe, one of its founders, remembered only too well that, half a century earlier, a similar committee had been set up for himself to support him in his fight for the supreme title. The Timman committee did not exist for long: in 1980 one of its members, Waling Dijkstra, died, followed a year later by Max Euwe himself.

In chess, as in life, Jan Timman is a born optimist. Even in recent times, when he often ends up in the lower half of the tournament table, all the games he loses seem to him to be absurd misunderstandings, whereas his wins somehow go without saying. When it comes to steering between these two extreme viewpoints – the conviction that the sky is the limit and the conviction that you will never get anywhere – you should firmly walk the middle line. But if you have to choose, then it seems to me that overrating your chances – reckless optimism – is less harmful to a chess player than underrating them. For a start, over-optimism is easier to cure: falling and getting bruised is bound to quickly teach you objectivity, whereas fear of your opponent's threats, real or imagined, allowing yourself to be intimidated by big names, thinking about what will happen if you lose, constitute far more serious barriers on the way to the top.

An absolute confidence in the correctness of the chosen plan, or of precisely this manoeuvre or variation, was always typical of Jan, as it is of all the very strong players I have had occasion to meet. And so it is in life.

Chess master Barendregt, a professor at Amsterdam University, was a typical chess amateur, but the kind of amateur who had bested both Botvinnik and Portisch in tournaments. When he fell ill, Jan and I visited him in hospital several times. 'There was something I didn't like about how Johan looked today', I said, shaking my head, after one of these visits. 'Rubbish', said Timman, 'next week he'll be home.' When we learned about the unfavourable diagnosis a few days later, Jan merely shrugged his shoulders: 'He'll get over it. Nowadays they can treat many forms of cancer.' The illness spread rapidly, and two weeks later Barendregt died. I phoned Jan. 'Japanese acupuncture', Timman said confidently, 'if only they had used Japanese acupuncture from the start...'

One of Nabokov's books makes a brief mention of a character whose eyes are described as too kind for him to be a writer. A chess player sitting down at the board must to an even greater degree be strong and self-disciplined – in order to be able to struggle and be victorious. Timman, too, had this toughness and this mentality. And if he did not get a chance to demonstrate his own point of view in a game, there were always magazines and books. He wrote many books, full of original ideas and deep analyses, which were published in various languages. It cannot be said that his analyses were always free from mistakes, but behind them you invariably see the intensive working of his mind and the search for the truth.

It seems hard to believe now, but until ten years ago he never wrote down his analyses or the fruits of his theoretical researches, relying completely on his memory instead – and this despite his wide opening repertoire. Now he uses a computer, but like most grandmasters of the older generation, he uses it only as a database. During a game he records his moves in long notation, including the clock times. His handwriting is very clear and his letters never waver, however severe the time-trouble.

He has one more trait that is important for a professional sportsman. If you divide chess players, like musicians and actors, into two categories – those who begin preparing for a game, performance or concert hours before it starts by completely withdrawing into themselves, and those

who can laugh at a joke a minute before the start, but the next instant switch quite naturally into a completely different world – then Timman firmly belongs to the second category. This is, of course, an innate quality, a gift that, like strong nerves, cannot be developed by training.

He is a player of moods, and the more successful he is in a tournament, the more his self-confidence grows; his play becomes more powerful and he starts to look, and even walk, differently. In such a condition he is capable of producing a series of wins, irrespective of the strength of the opposition or the colour of the pieces. I always sensed this change in him, and seeing Timman in such a state of mind before a game I would say to myself: Watch out! Be extra careful!

Although I am eight years older than Jan, we began playing in big tournaments at almost the same time, which may be the reason why our difference in age has always felt less than the number of years involved. During these years I have played numerous games against him, resulting in a positive score – and a considerable one at that. He was the undisputed number one in Holland, while I was number two, and in every individual game he would try to underline this, even when the position on the board did not warrant it. But in the next game, irrespective of the colour of the pieces, he would invariably press forward again. Having to play a game against him also induced a special mood in me, however.

For about twenty years, the composition of the Dutch team was constantly changing, but the first two boards remained constant and nearly always constituted the driving force of the team.

During the Olympiads the Dutch players were often reprimanded by the arbiters for talking during play. Timman and I were also guilty of this. In justification I can only say that the positions on the board rarely came up in these conversations. They were about, for example, the entirely non-chess-related qualities of the second board of the Argentine ladies' team, or about the previous evening, when in the hotel bar the solid leader of the Finnish team, Heikki Westerinen, after listening attentively to the exhortation by an experienced grandmaster about the need to stick to a strict regime during a tournament, agreed with him as follows: 'I respect your point of view, dear colleague, but for the moment: Waiter! Another glass of beer!'

For many long years Timman's second and sparring-partner was Ulf Andersson. Although a very subtle positional player, Andersson does not remember any of his games and never plays for a win in the opening. A brilliant analyst with a supreme endgame technique, Ulf is a typical example of Swedish restraint and correctness. But in contrast to the Swedish chess symbol of the previous generation, Stahlberg, and to Jan himself, Andersson prefers to drink only lemonade or Coca-Cola.

The night out that Timman has been accustomed to since he was young has been a constant of his way of life, so that young players who see him after a round with the almost obligatory glass in his hand, may well think that at some point in his youth he was a hard drinker and has never changed since. During an Olympiad he loves the evenings when, with a cigarette in one hand and a glass in the other, he attends the after-dinner sessions where the games of the day are analysed with lots of jokes and general laughter. He loves meetings and gatherings with friends in the bar or in the hotel lounge, which often last till well past midnight. But in the years of boundless self-confidence in which the young find the a realisation of their own strength, he was able to render unto Bacchus the things that were Bacchus's, and unto Caissa the things that were Caissa's.

In a player's younger years the chess goddess gets along very easily with her light-hearted friend, but as he ages Caissa becomes grumpier, more selfish and vindictive; demanding that he pay attention only to herself. Although she by no means always responds benevolently even then, this is an indispensable condition of success: for the sake of it you must sacrifice everything. Everything? This is easier said than done. After all, the tragedy of old age is not that you age, but that you remain young, and although Timman has already turned fifty, he is still marked with the carefree stamp of youth.

The saying 'Everything comes to him who waits' does not, alas, extend to chess. And it definitely does not apply to a player who has reached the age of fifty. This is a cruel profession like no other one, demanding a colossal expenditure of 'life fuel' – nervous energy – so that, for ageing grandmasters, chess is often equivalent to the hair-shirt that the medieval monk used to wear next to his skin. As they grow older, players of a tactical bent often become impatient and start playing even more sharply, aiming to provoke a critical situation on the board as

quickly as possible. More strategically minded players, such as Karpov, on the other hand, will try to decide a game by technique alone, and this has been another notable change in Timman of late. Unfortunately, this only works with opponents who are significantly inferior in strength.

It is clear that he will no longer be World Champion; and playing for rating points, prizes, good standings in tournaments – that's a routine he's already been through so often...

Invitations to all-play-all tournaments have become increasingly rare, and in recent years he has begun playing in open tournaments. This is a slippery slope that strong grandmasters try to avoid: there are no particular laurels to be earned, and it can easily turn into a protracted rush hour from which there is no return to strong tournaments.

He is constantly having dreams, normally in colour. Usually they are about landscapes, islands and waterfalls. Sometimes they are about chess. One of the oldest ones is this: an Olympiad, he is playing Hort, who offers a draw. Timman replies: 'I will have to ask my captain.' On receiving a categorical refusal, he returns to his board and, offering Hort his hand, says: 'It's OK, Vlastimil.'

Another dream is a more recent one. Together with Kasparov he is in some castle. They are surrounded by a lake, or a sea, with waves. 'We are talking about a position in which I am two pawns down but I have the two bishops. We argue, and in the end Kasparov agrees with me that I have sufficient compensation for the material...'

A tendency to pensiveness, dreaminess, to slipping into his own world, were typical of Jan right from his childhood. Often, when startled by the sound of the teacher's voice during a lesson: 'Timman! Stop day-dreaming! Did you hear what I just said?', he would briefly return to the world of German case endings only to return immediately afterwards to some other distant place. In those secondary school years he composed his first study, but the exercise book in which he recorded it has not withstood the test of time.

Since then the total number of studies composed by Timman has risen to more than a hundred. On average he spends roughly ten hours on an endgame study, but it does happen, of course, that his initial set-up fails to work, and then the idea demands much more time.

Leonid Kubbel, Mark Liburkin and Vladimir Bron are his favourite composers. He admires the work of Leopold Mitrofanov and recently composed a study dedicated to his memory. Timman also attentively follows the work of Vasily Smyslov, and he thinks that the former World Champion's recent compositions resemble the creations of Selezniev. A small book of Selezniev's studies, modestly published in Germany with a preface by Lasker from the start of the previous century, is preserved in the Timman library.

Chess composition, a noble occupation for grandmasters of the old school, is something that is not at all prevalent among the young top players of today. In a practical, pragmatic sense, a skill like this yields those young players nothing tangible, and the current generation is very distant, of course, from Timman and the best players of yesterday. But will it be closer to what will replace it tomorrow?

Perhaps it is this love of studies that explains Timman's extensive endgame knowledge. It is impossible to imagine him losing an endgame of rook against rook and bishop, or not winning with queen against rook. But he also knows numerous rare endings. Thus, at the Interzonal tournament in Rio de Janeiro 1979, he won an ending against Velimirovic that turned a new page in endgame theory.

He has a good command of the main European languages. The strongest, as with nearly everyone in Holland, is English. This followed by German and then French.

When he was fourteen his father, who had been at a congress in Moscow, gave him Romanovsky's *Mittelshpil*, and when he discovered that nearly all the chess terms in Russian are identical to the German ones, he immediately tried to read it. Reading the Russian chess literature is still no great problem to him, and while listening to a dialogue between Petrosian and Balashov in Rio de Janeiro at the Interzonal tournament after the adjournment of his game against Balashov, Timman understood everything, although this did not help him to save the game, which had been adjourned in a lost position.

In 1973 I gave Timman and Böhm a few Russian lessons: the two friends were getting ready to go to Leningrad for the Interzonal tournament. The lessons did bear some fruit: on appearing in the tournament press centre they grandly greeted everybody in Russian, and when

someone took the chance to speak to a foreigner without an interpreter and approached Hans Böhm with a lengthy tirade, Böhm, after listening attentively, asked in flawless Russian: 'I beg your pardon?' The person immediately launched into more lengthy explanations, only to be asked the same question again...

During their long walks the friends frequently came across statues of the person for whom the city had been named then, and each time Böhm would ask: 'Who is this? Who is this? Solzhenitsyn?' But for some reason the passers-by only quickened their step and hurried by without replying.

After finishing school Jan got a 'Russian library' for a present and read nearly all of Dostoevsky – 'The only thing I didn't find time for was *Demons*' – and Turgenev. He read *Oblomov*, a book which is very popular in the West, and cried when Ilya Ilyich died. On the advice of his Greek teacher he read Babel and he still remembers the heroes of Odessa.

He has been to Russia seventeen times; many habits there are to his taste, even though they are presented to a foreigner in a touched-up and theatrical form. Present in his character are elements of the Russian 'hoping for the best' and, to an even greater degree, the well-known formula that 'everything is going to be alright'.

His photograph appeared on the front pages of newspapers in 1974, but not in connection with his chess successes. Unopened envelopes from the military authorities addressed to Jan Timman piled up on his table, until finally the military police arrived to arrest the young grandmaster who had ignored the army call-up. They dispatched him to a military prison, where he spent ten days. 'It wasn't such a bad time', he remembered later, 'except for the early mornings and the equally early lights-out. As it was, I could have lasted for a long time in my cell: a table, chair, chess set, books and walks from time to time. What else did I need...'

I meet Jan in a café on the Leidseplein in the very centre of Amsterdam. Nearly thirty years earlier he had lived just a stone's throw from here, in an upstairs room with a large Che Guevara poster above his bed, a wooden table strewn with wine glasses and a chess board on it with a

position retaining the outline of some nighttime analysis. Here you could find piles of chess magazines, several sheets of paper covered in dense handwriting – the starts of articles for *Schaakbulletin* – an invitation to a tournament in Yugoslavia, the remains of yesterday's supper, a letter from a girl who played against him in a simultaneous display in Groningen – in a blue sweater with reindeers, in case he had forgotten – and bulletins from the tournament in Spain, from which he had returned the previous week. Alongside lay a five-guilder note and some small change, and a reporter from the local rag, who had come to Jan for an interview, promptly asked him: 'Is that what you managed to win in the café yesterday?'

The windows of this room looked out onto the Rijksmuseum, and the museum clock, illuminated at night, beat out the time. Since then it has beaten out thirty years. They were years full of wonderful victories, bitter disappointments, books written and studies composed, ups and downs, the death of his parents, marriage, the birth of his children, divorce, life, life itself...

Two weeks earlier Jan had celebrated his fiftieth birthday. A person of that age already knows that involuntary shock when, on waking up, he asks himself: Am I really thirty... forty... now fifty? He has an unusually short haircut, which gives him the appearance of an American paratrooper – I have never seen him like this. His hair has somehow faded and now seems light-brown, but I know that this is not altogether so: he had started to go grey long ago. He has expanded and put on weight. Someone who has not seen him for a long time would find it hard to recognise in him the long-haired, skinny, dreamy-eyed youth. We order a glass of red wine, and then another one... 'You already know everything', he says.

'My father, of course, very much wanted me to be a mathematician. Once he had a conversation with Keres, who after a tournament in Wijk aan Zee gave a simultaneous display in Delft against university lecturers and students. Keres rated mathematics higher than chess, although I am not sure if he really meant it or only said it out of respect for my father. But when I became a grandmaster, my father calmed down, reckoning that the grandmaster title more or less equates to a university degree. And if you consider chess from a scientific and re-

search point of view, I think that I have managed to achieve something in it...

'My travels around the world in those years? It was a wonderful, unforgettable time. In Buenos Aires I had a conversation with Borges; he was already completely blind by then. We talked about many things, including chess. Chess appealed to him as one of the manifestations of the human spirit, as a high form of art, but the competitive, destructive element in it was disagreeable to him.

'Which tournament do I regard as my greatest success? Mar del Plata in 1982, when I not only won, but also defeated Karpov, and Karpov at that time was nearly always first. Well, there was also the Interzonal in Mexico, in Taxco in 1985, when I finished two points ahead of the second-prize winner. But all this happened before your eyes.

'I am not particularly fond of Holland; they are unable to appreciate their heroes here, who are much more respected abroad. No, I am talking not only about myself, football players are another example of this, it is probably the Dutch mentality. I feel myself to be a citizen of the world and I could easily live somewhere else. London, for example, would be a very pleasant alternative.

'I met Fischer in Brussels in 1990. Everywhere we went – car, restaurant, nightclub – he would take out his pocket set and start analysing...

'What do you lose with age? In particular you lose the ability to concentrate for long, without which it is impossible to keep a game constantly under control. You lose energy, mental energy. I admire Kortchnoi, but I don't envy him, because I know what this colossal tension must be costing him.

'Of course, chess in the pre-computer era was both more interesting and more satisfactory from an analysis point of view. I remember how proud I was when in a game Dlugy-Sax, won by White, I found a surprising tactical blow that unexpectedly changed the assessment of the position. There can be no doubt that a computer would have found this combination in a second...

'Would I become a professional chess player if I had to choose a profession again today? No, definitely not. I chose this profession because I did not want to sit on a university bench for five or six hours a day, I wanted to play and be free and do what I wanted, not to be ac-

countable to anyone. But now chess is an exact science, mastered by hard and constant work, by many hours of sitting in front of a computer, and the playing element has disappeared. The magic of chess has gone...'

We leave the café. It is already completely dark, but the square is full of people – within a few days it will be New Year: 2002.

Twenty years ago, in the autumn of 1981, we were both playing in the three-way Holland-Austria-Poland match, an eliminator for the European Team Championship. The little Austrian town of Braunau was altogether unremarkable, apart from one house in its very centre, where in the late nineteenth century Adolf Schickelgruber was born.

Holland were clearly stronger than their opponents, the competition became a formality and immediately after it Jan and I set off on the main goal of our Austrian journey: Merano, where the Karpov-Kortchnoi match was being played. In Innsbruck we found that a train for Northern Italy had just left, and that we would have to wait nearly three hours for the next one. Jan suggested going to Merano by taxi and we entered into negotiations with a driver, a handsome Tirolean with a luxuriant moustache, who greatly approved of Timman's plans. I was against the idea. Although the driver did not understand the language that Jan and I were speaking to each other, he guessed the nature of my counter-arguments, which Jan heeded in the end.

It was a warm and still October evening, and everything around us was coloured in yellowy-green hues. The bottle of wine that we ordered in the little station restaurant went down quite quickly, followed by a second one, and then a third. The Riesling was pleasant on the palate, and the time spent conversing passed imperceptibly.

When we settled ourselves in the train, I asked an old lady in traditional Tirolean dress what time we would be arriving in Merano. 'Aber dies ist der Zug nach Kufstein', she replied. 'What do you mean', said Jan, joining in the conversation, 'this is the train to Merano.' 'Nein! Nein!' the old woman firmly insisted, 'es ist der Zug nach Kufstein.' I now knew what had happened and I tugged Jan's sleeve: 'Come on, we've only got two minutes.' But he refused to give in: 'No, I am sure that this train goes to Merano...'

'If you had listened to me then,' said Jan, when the taxi had taken us to the Italian border, 'we would have been in Merano now...'

At the Brenner Pass we made a stop. The driver went off to drink coffee, while we approached the precipice. It had grown cold. Dusk was beginning to fall. Everywhere lay mountains cut by deep gorges, and here and there little patches of cloud hung in the ravines. When we arrived in Merano it was completely dark.

Essig Fleisch

Salo Flohr 1908-1983

In May 2002, during the Eurotel Trophy in Prague, the foyer of the Radisson SAS Hotel was a beehive of activity where the key players in the 'peace pact' negotiations met. Mobile phones were ringing permanently as Kasparov, Kramnik, their managers, and journalists discussed and speculated about the unification that should ultimately produce a match for the World Chess Championship.

In May 1938, the same hotel on Stepan Street, then called the Alkron Hotel, witnessed the signing of another official agreement about a match for the World Championship. The match was to be subsidised by the owner of the largest footwear factory in Europe, Tomas Bata, who had guaranteed the necessary sum of 10,000 dollars. Everywhere in Prague one could see portraits of a smiling young man, the chess hope of the country, urging you to buy shoes only from this firm. The match was due to take place at the end of 1939 in several towns in Czechoslovakia. The historic scene showing the signing of the protocol had been filmed and shown in the capital's cinemas. The agreement had been signed by the World Champion Alexander Alekhine and the challenger to this title, Salo Flohr.

If you go out of the Alkron and proceed via the Luzern Passage to Vodichka Street and turn to the right, you will end up in front of a building that is known to all Prague people: U Novaka. Before the War there was a variety theatre here, and by day, in the café with the same name, chess players used to meet. In 1931 the fourth Chess Olympiad was held in U Novaka. The Czech team was led by Salo Flohr. The previous year in Hamburg the 22-year-old Flohr, playing on board one for Czechoslovakia, scored 14½ points out of 17, the second best result, half a point behind Akiba Rubinstein from Poland. It seems incredible, but eight years earlier Salo had not yet learned to play chess. He was taught the game by his older brother Moses when he was already thirteen years old. The young boy was immediately captivated by the game. He attended a blindfold simultaneous display by Jacques Mieses that completely baffled him and only six months passed before Salo himself sat down in

simuls against players with whom he was soon to meet at the chess board one to one: Alexander Alekhine, Richard Réti and Rudolf Spielmann. He began to frequent the Prokes Chess Club and took part in tournaments in the National Club. Salo played in sharp combinative style, attacking, and sacrificing pawns and pieces left and right. The young promise was hardly seen in the Prague cafés. He would appear there for a short time, drink a cup of coffee, and then disappear. In the chess clubs which he visited, he did not stay on after his game was finished either. What was he doing for days on end? I would venture to suggest that he was studying chess.

Flohr's chess university became the tournaments that he covered as a correspondent for Czech newspapers. He saw Lasker, Capablanca, Nimzo-witsch, Rubinstein, Spielmann, Marshall, Réti and Tartakower. He watched them playing, and analysing. The international language of chess was then German, and the papers for which Salo Flohr wrote also came out in German: *Bohemia* and *Prager Tagesblatt*. For him this was only natural as Jews then comprised a significant part of the German-speaking community of the city.

Hans Kmoch described the Salo Flohr of those years, after he had observed him at the crowded König Café in Berlin in 1928: 'Particularly noticeable is the correspondent from Prague, whose appearance makes one compassionately want to offer him the odds of a rook. He, however, does not attach any significance to this courtesy, but on the contrary, he happily agrees to raise the stakes and wins with irritating consistency. A hundred times they have told him, cried, that he is a miserable fop, that in all the games he was lost and that he wins only thanks to incredible luck. But this correspondent is deaf, he smiles, continuing to play indefatigably, defeating even the most constant habitués... They sit down stronger opponents against him – and he continues winning. Then they want one of the masters to do battle with him, but the masters are not very willing, and as far as possible they avoid playing him. Those brave enough will soon realise that they are dealing with a terribly tough nut.'

Flohr had no trainers or seconds, and all that he attained in chess was achieved thanks to his natural talent and the experience that he acquired through practice. In photographs of that period Salo Flohr bears

an amazing resemblance to Charlie Chaplin: short and dark-haired, with sharply outlined, deep-set eyes, smoothed-back hair, with a narrow parting, delicate features, bushy eyebrows, and always in a suit and tie, fastened in a broad knot.

In 1933 Flohr played at the Olympiad in England, in Folkestone. He was 25 years old. During one of the matches a girl appeared in the tournament hall. She was only eighteen and she was Czech. In Folkestone Vera Meisnerova was studying English. Life was rather tedious, and she and her friends decided to take a look at an unusual spectacle.

The romance between Salo Flohr and Vera Meisnerova lasted more than a year. They met in England, in Holland and in Prague, and they wrote to each other almost every day. Salo knew Czech quite well, but when he spoke in it, it was immediately apparent that it was not his native language, and so more frequently, they spoke in German, Flohr's strongest language. They would have married, but Vera's parents were opposed to it, and the life of each of them went its own way. Although he was married twice, every time that he went to Czechoslovakia, Salo Flohr would see her, the last time a year before he died. Now Vera Meisnerova is 87 years old, and she lives in a small town not far from Prague.

In this decade before the War, Salo Flohr took part in 35 international tournaments, winning nineteen and finishing in the top three in another nine. He was four times the winner at the festival in Hastings, shared first places at the international tournaments in Moscow 1935 and Kemer 1937, and won outright in Leningrad in 1939. In these events he finished ahead of several former and future World Champions. His name was spoken in the same breath as those of Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine and Euwe. As a result Flohr was recommended by FIDE for a match with Alekhine, after winning by eight votes to five over the other candidate. The other candidate was none other than José Raúl Capablanca.

At that time the style and manner of Flohr's play had already taken shape. He was a brilliant positional player, a master of exploiting the slightest advantage, an outstanding technician, who understood that chess is a simple finite game, the aim of which is to give mate to the

enemy king. The way of achieving this: deploy the fighting units in their optimal positions, and in the event of exchanges, leave yourself with the better pieces. Who better than Flohr could exploit the advantage of the two bishops, an isolated pawn, or a weak point in the opponent's position?

Alekhine, annotating one of his games with him, wrote: 'Flohr at the beginning of his career was sometimes superficial in the defence of his king's position. But certainly he has now become one of the most cautious (if not the most) masters living!' Flohr lost rarely, very rarely. Win against the weak and draw with the strong – this was his motto. At the tournament in Kemer, he won against the seven players who ended up in the lower half of the tournament table, and drew with the first ten. In the mid-1930s he had a period when, playing one hundred games in strong tournaments, he lost only one.

Describing the style of Reuben Fine, Flohr once wrote: 'From the games of Fine, a splendid practitioner, one can learn, but it is hard to be carried away by them.' These words could just as well apply to himself. In 1937 the Soviet magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR* noted: 'Soviet players are able to create and struggle freely. They do not have hanging over them the sword of Damocles of material considerations and calculations, the pressure of which is so well familiar to the bourgeois professional. Banality, stereotypes, routine, sheer technique, everything that is justifiably classed by Romanovsky as the 'Fine-Flohr style', is fundamentally alien to the creativity of Soviet masters.'

In his reply Flohr wrote: 'A young master often begins playing in a wild combinative way. Then, under the influence of life's experience, he evolves in the direction of modern play. This process is inevitable. Otherwise the young 'tactician' will not rise above average standard and will be pushed aside by more accomplished players.' At that point he was not yet a Soviet citizen, but a candidate for the World Championship, 'a bourgeois grandmaster, a representative of the capitalist West', as Soviet newspapers described him, and he was able to write that which he thought, and not that which he ought to think.

In 1933 Flohr arrived in the Soviet Union for the first time. He was to play a match with the 22-year-old champion of the country, Mikhail Botvinnik. The first part of the event took place in Moscow, in the Hall

of Columns, and every day up to two thousand people came to watch the games. Flohr had never seen anything like it. They looked at him as if he were a miracle. He won the first and the sixth games of the match, which then continued in Leningrad. Here the enthusiasm of the public was no less. After Botvinnik won the ninth and the tenth games, the ovation in the hall lasted fifteen minutes, during which the spectators kept chanting: 'Flohr- Botvinnik, Flohr-Botvinnik!' After this first stay, Flohr visited the Soviet Union often, very often. And always a royal reception awaited him. He was met by important officials, photographers, journalists and chess fans, and he stayed at the best hotels. Here is a brief news item from those years: 'After arriving in Moscow, the Czech grandmaster Flohr, together with Doctor Lasker, was present at the First May Parade on Red Square.' And here is another from 27th June 1938: 'Grandmaster Flohr has arrived in our country for the sixth time. He intends to spend several months here, resting and preparing for the AVRO tournament.'

It is not surprising that he wrote then: 'Yes, chess masters have a splendid life in the Soviet Union! Long live the first chess country in the world – the Soviet Union!' Flohr, like most of the writers and intellectuals of the West, who before the War ventured to visit the USSR, judged this country only by its brilliant façade, and it appeared to him to be unusual and wonderful, just as the little town, where Henry IV stopped for a few hours, seemed delightful to him. 'For travellers, but not for those who live here permanently', the old monk remarked respectfully to the king.

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938, Salo Flohr wandered about an already smouldering Europe. 'Hitler followed hard on my heels', he later recalled. 'When I was in England, the bombing of London began. I returned to the continent, and Holland capitulated within two weeks.' Flohr played in neutral Sweden, in which Spielmann, who had emigrated from Austria, had already settled, but who could know how things would turn out, since Norway, in the end, was also occupied. Of course, he remembered that there was also the Soviet Union, that his friend André Lilienthal had been living there for several years, and had already become a Soviet citizen. And Salo Flohr made up his mind.

The paradox of his emigration was that he went from a world that was free to one that was not. But it was not only that. In that freedom-lacking country the most important thing in his life was a matter of state importance, and he himself was held in high esteem. True, both for this esteem, and for his comparatively comfortable existence, he had to pay with pieces of his soul, which partially died, and partially was regenerated.

Within six months the war also arrived in the Soviet Union. Flohr and his wife left Moscow and were evacuated first to Central Asia, and then to Georgia. In 1942 in Tbilisi, as a distinguished foreigner, he was accommodated in the Intourist Hotel. Flohr later remembered: 'When we arrived there, we were warmly congratulated. It turned out that the Soviet government had complied with my application for Soviet citizenship. They took my Czech passport and presented me with a Soviet one. They reminded me that on returning to the hotel I needed to register my passport. This I did. The next morning my wife and I waited as usual for them to bring breakfast. For some reason they did not do so. They also didn't bring dinner. When I asked the manager what was going on, he explained that we would no longer be fed, because we weren't foreigners. And he added that we should find somewhere else to live, since we were not allowed to occupy a room in the hotel: this was a hotel for foreigners.'

For people, who have maintained their principles and convictions in perfect order, not allowing a hint of doubt, fear, conformism or lying to creep in, it will be hard to understand that time and that country in which Salo Flohr found himself. His second life in the Soviet Union can be considered only from this time perspective. His life, like that of many others then, was determined by conformism, caution and prudence, which in other languages could have been classed as cowardice and an outward observance of the norm that was accepted in that country.

There were few people with whom he could be absolutely frank. One was Paul Keres, an old friend and colleague, and a person of similar fate. When they met, they would often speak in German, not only because that was the language of their youth, but also because they would return to that time when they could say what they thought and be where they wanted, without being accountable to anyone.

In ancient Persia one of the severest forms of punishment used to be imprisonment and the death penalty a few years later. This is the path that is followed by practically every chess professional. Before it becomes clear that your career is finally and inevitably coming to an end, there is a period of decline. With Flohr this period began at a comparatively young age. His last major success was his win in Leningrad in 1939, where apart from Keres and Reshevsky, the entire cream of Soviet chess took part with the exception of Botvinnik. Of course, almost everything that is great in chess is done by the young, but at the time he was only 31 years old. Trying to find an explanation for this rapid decline, Flohr said at the end of his life: 'The war undermined my health, and shattered my nerves. A number of my chess conceptions demanded a decisive revision. I was never particularly noted for my knowledge of opening theory, but in my youth this was compensated by other factors. After the war an offensive was mounted over the entire chess front by Soviet masters. They pushed aside not only me, but also the other leading players from the West. And yet the main reason for my post-war lack of success was something else. The battle for the chess throne demands fantastic dedication, and I did not have this. I did not sweat over my chess and I stopped fighting.'

He was unsuccessful in the Interzonal tournament in 1948 and in the Candidates' tournament two years later. He still played in some tournaments in the Soviet Union, and some second-rate ones abroad, but he was no longer the grandmaster that Botvinnik once compared to Napoleon and about whom he said: 'In the 1930s they all trembled before Flohr.'

For him playing chess faded into the background. Now it only supplemented his heraldry, but it occupied less and less of his coat-of-arms. Despite his diminished activity, his understanding of the game remained remarkable, and Flohr helped and seconded many players including Botvinnik, Taimanov and Petrosian. But in this capacity too he could not evade the everyday reality of Soviet life.

The twenty-third, penultimate game of the match for the World Championship between Botvinnik and Bronstein remained a bitter and painful memory for him for the rest of his life. Botvinnik was behind in the match and needed a win at all cost. The game was adjourned in a

position where Botvinnik's two bishops were clearly stronger than Bronstein's knights. After lengthy thought Botvinnik sealed a move and together with Flohr left the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall. The move sealed by Botvinnik was fairly obvious, and a contented Flohr, analysing in his mind the variations that promised victory, accompanied Botvinnik to his place. After supper they once more looked at the position, and Salo set off home for a final polishing of the variations. The following day Flohr was again at Botvinnik's place. 'Salo, could you show the variations to Gannochka, I should like to have one more look at the position', said the World Champion. Flohr was somewhat dumbfounded, but nevertheless, after setting up the position on the board, he began demonstrating something to Botvinnik's wife, although she barely knew the moves of the pieces.

Some time later the champion himself came back, the friends had lunch, and set off to the playing venue. Before climbing up onto the stage, Botvinnik quietly, so that no one could hear, admitted to his helper: 'You know, Salo, I sealed a different move...' Tears welled up in Flohr's eyes, and for a long time he was unable to forget the resentment that he felt towards his suspicious and mistrustful old friend Misha.

If books are classified into two categories, those of immediate interest and books for all time, then everything written by Flohr, in contrast to the books of Tartakower, Nimzowitsch and Alekhine, can be confidently assigned to the first category. Moreover, he didn't really write any books. The collection published in the Soviet Union after his death consists of articles from various magazines and newspapers, sketches, and reports from tournaments and World Championship matches. Flohr wrote as he spoke, not agonising over the choice of word, and dipping his pen in treacle he carefully steered clear of any form of criticism. He wrote favourably about all grandmasters, although he idolised only one – Misha Tal. His articles and reports, full of jokes and anecdotes, evoke the French saying, so often repeated by Swift: *Vive la bagatelle!* (Long live trivialities!) His humour was gentle and kind, at which one would smile rather than laugh, unpretentious, as though from a Jewish anecdote, where the point is often related in the story itself.

But for Soviet readers, who were not exactly spoilt by a diversity of styles, these articles and reports by Flohr also provided something warm, and special. For them he opened slightly the curtain on Hastings and London, Prague and Amsterdam, on countries from the West, that were mysterious and unknown to them. He became the toastmaster at a festival of pre-war chess, full of glorious names, which sounded like music: Nimzowitsch, Rubinstein, Tartakower, Spielmann, Marshall. With his easy attitude to life and his constant jokes he created an impression of cheerful optimism, although this optimism most probably resembled the definition of Candide, who explained to his servant that optimism is a passion for asserting that everything is good, when in fact everything is bad.

Yet, he was both touchy and easily hurt. At the concluding banquet in Nottingham in 1936, Capablanca made a speech. He compared this tournament with London 1922, New York 1927 and Moscow 1936, where everywhere he took first prize. He was interrupted by Flohr. 'And Moscow 1935? And Margate? And Hastings?' he shouted from his seat.

During the match in Baguio in 1978 between Karpov and Kortchnoi, Flohr phoned Smyslov and, after dictating the adjourned position, asked his evaluation. 'Well, what do the experts say?' the former World Champion enquired in turn. Flohr couldn't believe his ears. 'Experts? What other experts are there? You and I are the main experts! Say that we're also experts. Experts, experts...' he kept on grumbling.

He could reprimand the dreamy Aronin, for forgetting to greet him, while Boris Spassky remembers how, on arriving once in the Central Chess Club in Moscow, he saw Flohr and Keres. 'Hello, you old players!' he greeted them both. Keres reacted calmly and with good humour to Spassky's words, but Flohr for some reason flared up: 'And who do you think you are? A trivial little player, nothing more...'

I first saw Salo Flohr in September 1965 in Sukhumi, where the All-Union Student Championship was being held. The famous maestro, who was on holiday in Abkhazia, appeared on the beach in a lightweight white suit and with a Panama on his head. Observing the analysis of the young players, he did not say anything. Occasionally he would smile as he followed the flashing of the hands over the board,

and only sometimes, in the case of an over-impetuous pawn move, would he point with his finger at the neighbouring square, which had been given up to the eternal control of the opponent. A gesture which I adopted from him, and which I still use when analysing with young players.

He visited Holland regularly and we saw each other at the tournament in Tilburg or in the FIDE office, which was then in Amsterdam. The last occasion was in the early spring of 1983, a few months before his death. We met on a square in the centre of town and slowly made our way along the trays of flowers, situated directly on the canal, to the Munt Tower. Small and round, with grey and thinning hair, bags under his watery eyes, discoloured pupils, wrinkles of skin under his chin, an old-fashioned suit, classical tie, cuffs and cuff links – he no longer resembled Charlie Chaplin, but was more likely to be taken for a bank official, enjoying a deserved rest in the last period of his life. He stopped now and then, to buy seeds for flowers for his dacha friends, souvenirs, and little presents: white and blue tea-towels with windmills, key rings and Ajax football shirts – the usual tourist collection. ‘Well, I don’t seem to have forgotten anyone’, he said, glancing from time to time at the lengthy list prepared back in Moscow. Apart from chess, Salo Flohr had another gift, one not given to many: the gift of giving. This is something one is born with, and it is no accident that in many languages this word ‘gift’ has two meanings.

We walked to the end of the flower market and stopped by the Carlton Hotel, where in 1938 he had been present at discussions between Alekhine and Botvinnik about a match for the World Championship. His own contract, already signed, had lost all point, as the war in Europe had already become a reality. ‘The World Champion was in an excellent mood, and he even paid for the tea himself’, Flohr smiled. ‘This was not at all like him: Alexander Alexandrovich didn’t easily part with money.’ The conversation turned to Euwe, Lasker and Capablanca, Knoch and Tartakower. For Salo Flohr, chess history was not a book that had been written, but a life that had been lived, and at 74 he had reached that age when the past excites more strongly than the present, to say nothing of the future. Like many old people, he did not take into account the age of the person he was talking to and sometimes he

would ask me: 'Do you remember Sämisch?' or 'Did you ever meet Bogoljubow?'

'Coffee, coffee, it's time to rest', he exclaimed. Like a born idler and sybarite, he belonged to that category of people who begin to rest before they get tired. 'Opposite this bridge there should be a café. At least, there was one in 1932, when I played my match with Max.' We reached the river, and on the opposite bank could already be seen the massive building of the Amstel Hotel, in which he had lived during the AVRO tournament, the most unsuccessful tournament in his life. It was the end of 1938, the smell of burning had already enveloped Europe, and for Flohr literally everything had collapsed: the match for the World Championship, the country in which he lived, and the way of life to which he was accustomed. 'Do you know when I last saw Bogoljubow? I can tell you the exact date: 18 March 1939 at the tournament in Riga. I remember that day, because on 15 March the Germans had taken Prague, and Bogoljubow was all beaming, saying that now at last there would be order in Europe, since he then idolised the Führer. We played three days later, and you can imagine how much I wanted to win. At the end he sat red-faced, like a lobster, and when he resigned, I had only one thought: that's in return for Prague.'

He was what they call a *causeur*, a storyteller, and he was much more interesting to listen to, than to read. It was a pity that he did not want, or, more probably, as a Soviet citizen, was simply unable to write about Alekhine and Capablanca, Euwe and Lasker, in the way that he saw and knew them, instead of the strongly re-touched portraits that were published under his name.

'What openings would you have played against Alekhine, if the match had taken place?' Or 'If it was again the year 1940, would you still have gone to the Soviet Union or would you have stayed in London?' I tried to elicit from him. 'If ifs and ands were pots and pans', he philosophically parried my thrust. 'You know what the Poles say: if your aunt had a moustache, she would be your uncle.' And he laughed at my even more direct Russian equivalent of this popular Polish wisdom. 'Of course, I would have avoided the mistakes that I made, but, on the other hand, I would have undoubtedly made many others...'

We again drank coffee, and early in the evening we dined in a Chinese restaurant, not far from the Bellevue Hall, where, almost half a

century before, the last game of the Alekhine-Euwe match had taken place, and Salo Flohr was the second to his friend Max, who that day became World Champion. 'Are you sure, Genna, that this is a Chinese restaurant?' he asked. 'Some of their meat is sweet and sour, just like *Essig Fleisch*. Do you know what *Essig Fleisch* is?'

When we parted he unexpectedly shed a few tears and began talking about himself in the third person: 'Salo Flohr won't be coming to Holland again.' To my determined objections he replied that he felt for sure that we wouldn't see each other again. And however much I repeated: 'What rubbish you're talking, Salomon Mikhailovich', he stuck to his guns, and he was right, I never saw him again. He died in Moscow on 18 July 1983.

Salomon Mikhailovich Flohr was born in the Galician village of Gorodino, in Poland, which was then part of the Russian empire. Now this is a small town in the Ivano-Frankovsky Province in the Ukraine. The official date of his birth was 1 November 1908, but neither he, nor his elder brother Moses, the only members of the large Jewish family to survive the pogrom, could remember the exact date. His brother, who was four years older than Salo, replaced his father, and their ties were never broken, even when Salo moved to the Soviet Union, and Moses remained in Czechoslovakia.

Little Motl in Sholem Aleichem's story says: 'I'm fine – I'm an orphan...', but it is doubtful whether Salo could have repeated those words. He did not like remembering his childhood and he never talked about those days. For a time he lived in an orphanage in the Moravian town of Lipnik. From the orphanage he was taken to be brought up in a family in the town of Litomerice, when the local rabbi asked for the brightest boy to be sent. In 1924 the brothers moved to Prague. That same year they received a summons from Mendel Vilner, the owner of grocery store in Brooklyn, New York, the father of three children, and a recently naturalised citizen of the United States. The uncle of Moses and Salomon invited both his nephews to America, and they began preparing for the departure. But the entry quota to the United States ended, and Salo Flohr remained in Prague. He completed only two classes of an economics school and began working at an early age.

How would Salo Flohr's life have turned out, if the emigration quota to America had not ended at that time? Would he have frequented some chess café in Brooklyn or become a member of the Manhattan Chess Club? Would he have rivalled Sammy Reshevsky and Reuben Fine in the American Championships and would he have travelled to the major tournaments on the European continent, to become what he in fact became – one of the strongest grandmasters in the world and a star of the first magnitude? Or would he have given up the game, and become, like many emigrants, a doctor, lawyer, accountant, actor, or, like his uncle – a tradesman and the respectable father of a family? What would have happened if Salo had remained in Prague during the war? Moses, who in 1943 ended up in the Theresienstadt Camp, was saved by the fact that his brother was a well-known chess player. But what would have been the fate of Salo himself in those bloody times, when life and death stood side by side?

Salo Flohr did not leave any reminiscences. When already of an advanced age, he joked: 'I'm still too young to write my memoirs.' The times in which Salo Flohr had to live were difficult ones, but I think that it would have been even more difficult for him to write about his life. It turned out the way it did, and it was by no means a short life. And it was sweet and sour, like any life, like *Essig Fleisch*, the dish which his mum prepared so wonderfully in that little Galician village.

October 2002

Death of a Salesman

Eduard Gufeld 1936-2002

The life stories that the Roman historian Suetonius assembled in his book *The Twelve Caesars*, are all constructed on the same principle. First the author presents the bright aspects of the emperor he is describing, and then the narrative sharply changes tone. This method also suggests itself with regard to the late Eduard Gufeld. It is tempting, when talking about him, to ignore the well-known saying about the dead – either good or nothing; especially since the Romans also had another, less popular phrase, to wit: about the dead – the truth.

Let there be no misunderstanding: Eduard Gufeld was a very talented chess player. In his best years he was a decent grandmaster with a clearly defined style. And it was not his fault that he was overshadowed by the brilliant players of his generation such as Tal, Spassky, Stein and Polugaevsky. Gufeld played in eight championships of the Soviet Union, colossal clashes in which, apart from these contemporaries, he met players like Keres, Smyslov, Bronstein, Petrosian, Geller, Kortchnoi and Taimanov.

Some people hold the view that Gufeld was a tactical, combinative player. This opinion was largely promoted by himself, by constantly publishing his best and indeed remarkable games, won by combinations with sacrifices, such as his all-time favourite, his *Mona Lisa*, that he never tired of showing. But in fact, despite his excellent feeling for dynamics, Gufeld was a rather one-sided player with clear gaps in his chess education. It is sufficient to remember his unwavering, life-long attachment to the fianchetto of his dark-square bishop. When defending, he would aim to provoke a crisis, often with irreparable consequences: patience was something that he altogether lacked. But although they more often defeated him, Gufeld's service record included wins over Smyslov, Tal, Spassky, Kortchnoi, Bronstein, Gligoric, Polugaevsky, Beliavsky, Hort and Hübner. Not everyone can boast of such a constellation. It is notable, however, that none of those who played Gufeld in his heyday calls him a strong player. They call him striking, interesting, capable when in the mood of beating anyone – but they don't remember him as a strong player.

In his play he was frequently hindered by excessive emotion and susceptibility, a weakness that interestingly did not interfere with his training work. His energy and belief in ultimate victory could be infectious, and he could be very devoted to his protégé – Geller, with whom he worked for many years, or Maya Chiburdanidze, who admitted that before meeting Gufeld she played childish chess and that she was mainly indebted to him for the fact that she became World Champion.

In 1974, on their return to Moscow from the international tournament in Manila, Tigran Petrosian and Evgeny Vasiukov, as was customary then, were giving a report to a chess audience. ‘I will show my win over Portisch’, said Vasiukov, ‘although it won’t be of interest to Tigran Vartanovich, since he has already seen the game.’ ‘That’s all right, that’s all right, a good dish can be eaten twice’, was the gracious comment of the former World Champion, who was inclined at times to speak in a flowery Eastern manner.

Every grandmaster who has been a professional for many years, has several good, often brilliant games, of which he is proud. But it wouldn’t occur to any of these players to publish them year after year with pretentious names in books and chess magazines in all the countries of the world. ‘Immortal’ and ‘Evergreen’ were the names given to Anderssen’s games with Kieseritzky and Dufresne by his admiring contemporaries. The ‘Pearl of Zandvoort’ was the name given by the Dutch to a fine game won by Max Euwe against Alexander Alekhine in the World Championship match of 1935. ‘Mona Lisa’ was the name given by Eduard Gufeld to his win over Bagirov at the semifinals of the USSR Championship in Kirovabad in 1973. And although his opponent wrote later how, after the conclusion of this ‘Mona Lisa’, Edik was unable to point out a single sensible variation, and that he had been quaking with fear during the game and had drunk a litre of coffee – all this sounded rather like a criminal searching for mitigating circumstances and attempts to justify himself. ‘With this ‘immortal game’ Edik furnished his flat’, Bagirov commented gloomily, as Gufeld continued to demonstrate his masterpiece game again and again.

I once said to him: ‘If in the next world you had all the time to play through this game again and again, I don’t know if it would be a reward or a punishment.’ He merely laughed: ‘That would depend on the fee...’

Gufeld's passionate struggle for brilliancy and the creative element in chess would have deserved full respect, had he not taken things too far and exceeded all bounds of sense by suggesting evaluating the result of a player not by the number of points scored, but by the brilliance of the ideas demonstrated. And by contemptuously referring to 'rationalists', as he called grandmasters who finished ahead of him in tournaments, and praising creative players, among whom he included himself. Above everything that Gufeld did or suggested, there invariably hung the cloud of personal gain.

Gufeld wrote a mass of books – 47, as someone counted up. But don't be deceived, he always had ghost writers. He didn't like writing, but preferred speaking. I don't know if Gufeld knew the words of Pushkin about inspiration – which cannot be sold; and the manuscript – which is sold; but when he produced something he endeavoured if possible to sell it simultaneously in several editions. In olden times he wrote his articles and game commentaries using carbon paper, so that the second copy was hard to read, to say nothing of the third or fourth. The appearance of the photocopier was a real blessing for Gufeld. He didn't like to sit on his material for long and he could write a book in a few days with the help of scissors and glue, long before the start of the computer era.

Even the book of his best games, which was published in America and received good reviews, is an almost word for word translation of the book *Eduard Gufeld* which was published in the Soviet Union back in 1985, where half of it was written by the Kiev journalist Teplitsky. Publishing this book under his own name in America, Gufeld simply changed the third person to the first and, deleting a few loyal paragraphs which were no longer appropriate to the times, left for the trusting Western reader the following: 'I am very proud of five medals which were awarded to me by the government. Among them 'Ten years of irreproachable military service' and 'Fifteen years of irreproachable military service'. These medals remind me that when serving in the Soviet Army, I not only played chess and taught young chess players but was also performing my hard military duty.'

When more than forty years ago I saw Gufeld for the first time, he was still a slim and strikingly handsome young man, who was only

slightly beginning to put on weight. In the few blitz games that we played, Edik, when castling with white, would simultaneously place his rook on e1, and with black in the Stonewall Variation of the Dutch Defence with a bang he would transfer his queen directly from d8 to h5, to avoid losing time in the attack.

Of course, in tournament games Gufeld could not use such methods, but he had a whole range of other ones. Thus, when advancing a passed pawn in the endgame, with an elegant and demonstrative movement Edik would grasp a queen standing alongside the board, even though there was still a long way to the queening square. At a tournament in Vilnius, Gufeld was already on his way to the tournament hall to resume an adjourned game when he discovered that the move he had sealed lost by force. He burst into the hall and, grabbing the envelope from the arbiter's hands, opened it and ate the scoresheet, thus burying in himself the secret of the sealed move.

Very often he would offer a draw while his clock was running. His opponent would say to him: 'Make a move, please', and Edik could answer: 'By international rules I am not obliged to', which, of course, did not accord with reality. Once, playing Podgaets, who was then a young master, he offered a draw. The latter asked Gufeld to make a move, which displeased Edik. He nevertheless made a move, and when Podgaets, after thinking, agreed to share the point, he declared: 'Now it's you who has to make a move.' 'Yes, but didn't you offer me a draw?' 'And who heard that?' remarked Gufeld coldly. Remembering one of the games from his youth with Leonid Stein, Gufeld wrote: 'Before making the winning move, I asked: 'Lenya, would you like a draw?' 'Yes, of course', my opponent answered, in reply to which I said: 'Well, I don't!''

He would often make comments during a game. Sometimes, as in this last case, he would consider them witty, but often he would say something unpleasant or offensive. It was no accident, therefore, that, when playing Gufeld, every opponent, apart from the famous, with whom he did not venture such tricks, had to be constantly on his guard, especially in time trouble. 'Draw', the Belarus master Begun heard, when playing Gufeld. 'Is that an evaluation of the position or an offer?' he enquired to be on the safe side.

Before resigning a game Gufeld sometimes made use of a last chance: he would place a piece – usually a queen or rook – on a square where it was undefended: if his opponent did not notice this, on the next move he himself would have his strongest piece taken or would be mated. To increase the effect, he could loudly shout: ‘Check!’ This device could prove effective, especially if the opponent was in time trouble, and there was a chance that he would instinctively move his king.

Edik’s conception of morality was rather simple and fully in keeping with the conception of it by the leader of a primitive clan: if I steal the wife and a herd of cattle from the leader of an enemy tribe – that is good; if he does the same to me – that is bad.

In 1961 Kortchnoi took part in the USSR Championship, which was simultaneously a qualifier for the Interzonal tournament. Viktor Kortchnoi remembers: ‘In his concluding article about the tournament, Goldberg wrote that one of the participants was warned that losing deliberately was inadmissible, and that, despite this warning, after resigning one game his eyes were sparkling with the joy of defeat. Goldberg had in mind Gufeld’s game with his boss Geller, to whom he lost several times in this way.’

In chess there were several Gufelds. One – in contacts with Western journalists and colleagues who could be useful. Another – with chess officialdom, on whom he depended for being sent on foreign trips and to tournaments. The third – in his dealings with elite grandmasters, for whom he displayed features such as ‘sociability, wittiness and benevolence’, as was written, for example, by Tal. Gufeld’s entire behaviour with them differed strikingly with his attitude to ‘his own’ or those who stood, in his opinion, a step lower than himself on the hierarchic chess staircase. In this case he would wind himself up for a battle on all fronts. By nature he was a bit of a coward, and for him a psychological stimulus was simply essential. ‘I’ll crush him, I’ll destroy him today; he’ll learn what it means to play Gufeld’, he would motivate himself before a game. On meeting his opponent at breakfast in the hotel, he could demonstratively turn away and avoid greeting him, bringing himself even before the game into a state of full military preparedness.

During the game he might say things within his opponent’s earshot like: ‘He plays like a first category player, no better’; and after losing he

could avoid shaking hands, and insult his opponent. At the USSR Championship semifinal in Beltsy, after resigning his game to Semion Palatnik, he stood up and, turning to the players, arbiters and spectators, he loudly declared: 'I will not shake the hand of the friend of a traitor to the Motherland!', having in mind Lev Alburt who also, like Palatnik, came from Odessa, and who a few months earlier had requested political asylum in Germany.

In obituaries that appeared in the West immediately after Gufeld's death one could read that the secret – whether or not he was a KGB agent – was one that he took with him to the grave. Pathetic words. For those who lived in that fairy-tale time, the fact that Edik regularly travelled abroad, sometimes even alone, and to capitalist countries, speaks for itself. The point is not, of course, whether somewhere in the archives of this organisation are retained reports written under his name. The people who gave his trips the OK knew perfectly well that Eduard Efimovich Gufeld, in order to justify their trust in him, could fulfil any commission.

He spoke openly with the defectors Kortchnoi and Alburt in those cruel, highly politicised times. Kortchnoi remembers how at the World Team Championship in Lucerne in 1985 Gufeld went on at him: 'Well, what did you leave for? Why did you do this? What for? Can you explain it?' But to Alburt during the Olympiad in Thessaloniki a year earlier he spoke directly: 'Don't forget, one never knows, anything can happen. Here the Bulgarian border is not far away, and also your parents asked you to be informed that you should think carefully before saying or doing anything...'

Everywhere, where Gufeld appeared, one would hear his voice, his jokes, his laughter. Edik did not exactly belong to the supporters of Confucius, who stated that the smaller the number of words required to express your thoughts, the better. He had the reputation of being a jovial and witty person. Indeed, he was constantly jesting, and telling stories and anecdotes. But, strangely enough, his jokes, told in his rascally accent with his characteristic high-pitched voice, almost always while tugging at the other person's sleeve, would begin to bore and then to irritate. At the same time he could be charming and nice in his own way, and even warm with those to whom he was disposed, on

condition, of course, that these people did not in any way interfere with his vital interests.

All who were close to Gufeld knew of his typical passions, from which he could not rid himself to the end of his life. One such passion was buying and selling.

Viacheslav Eingorn had not seen Gufeld for several years, when he unexpectedly bumped into him in the very centre of Belgrade. 'So', Gufeld said to him instead of a greeting, 'you go straight ahead, then the second street on the right, and there round the corner is a shoe shop; mention my name and you'll get a discount, I would advise you to buy several pairs...' – and he continued on his way.

At a leather factory in Seville, after an excursion a group of chess players was invited to buy goods at reduced prices. Here too Gufeld demanded a discount, explaining his motives with perfect clarity: 'You should understand that I can't do otherwise; never in my life have I bought things at the prices shown on the tag.' When his colleagues received a small discount, in a shop where they went with Gufeld, it turned out that the main discount was for him, receiving a sheepskin coat for free.

Wherever I met Gufeld – in Seville, Thessaloniki, Kuala Lumpur or Manila – his hotel room always looked the same. Everywhere – on the bed, table, chair, or television were piles of books, intended for sale – the majority of them his own. There were also semi-finished products in various states of preparedness: articles written at night during the tournament or brought with him from the Soviet Union, which in his haste he had not managed to finish.

The second bed in the room would be completely heaped up: with red and green matrushka's, tea-cosies in the form of old women, ornamented caskets, supposedly handmade, enormous cardboard sheets with hundreds of badges: you never know when such a trifle may come in useful. It costs nothing, but for the member of a federation of some country, or simply a shop assistant or a waiter in a restaurant, such a little present may prove highly appropriate. Here and there were scattered all sorts of papers: the visiting cards of various FIDE officials, correspondence with the president of the federation of some exotic Asian country, telephone numbers written on scraps of paper the own-

ers of which Edik himself could not always remember, game scores sent to him as the president of the FIDE Commission Art in Chess for the prize of the most brilliant game of a tournament, a magnetic set with a position from a match between the women's teams of Italy and Bangladesh: during an Olympiad Edik had privately helped a girl who was playing on the second board for an Asian team: the money, of course, wasn't much, but if you change dollars into roubles, then, in a manner of speaking, one lesson was the equivalent of two-month's pay for an engineer in the Soviet Union.

Alongside the minibar one could observe a whole battery of bottles and cans, which Gufeld had moved out from there and replaced with stores seized after breakfast, with which throughout the day he would fortify himself from time to time. On the table by his bed lay: a bottle of Stolichnaya wrapped in a week-old copy of the newspaper *Sovietsky Sport*, an electric heater, an unfinished glass of tea, a thermometer and tablets in a variety of packagings: some time before Edik had been unwell, and he took with him pills for any eventualities in life.

Here too there was a whole pile of visiting cards of Edik himself, where on both sides – in Russian and in English – were designated all of the owner's titles. Out of necessity they were printed in very small type. The lengthy list began as follows: International grandmaster, Honoured Trainer of the USSR and the Georgian Republic, member of the union of Soviet journalists, trainer of the USSR teams, member of the international association of journalists writing on chess topics, chairman of the FIDE Commission Art in Chess. On a separate pile were visiting cards with a diagram from his game with Bagirov, his *Mona Lisa*.

Eduard Gufeld was a chess salesman, and, in order to show the true worth of the goods, he thought that glossy packaging was needed. He sold his goods with inspiration. After Edik had moved to America the head of a firm wrote to him: 'You are not only a grandmaster of chess, but also a Great Master in selling the game to ordinary enthusiasts. If you worked in my business, I would bestow on you the degree of 'Highest Order of Salesman.''

At one of the Olympiads the Indian women's team, for whom the Khadilkar sisters were playing, performed splendidly. 'Come on, show us the secret of your success', they were asked by Edik, who was then

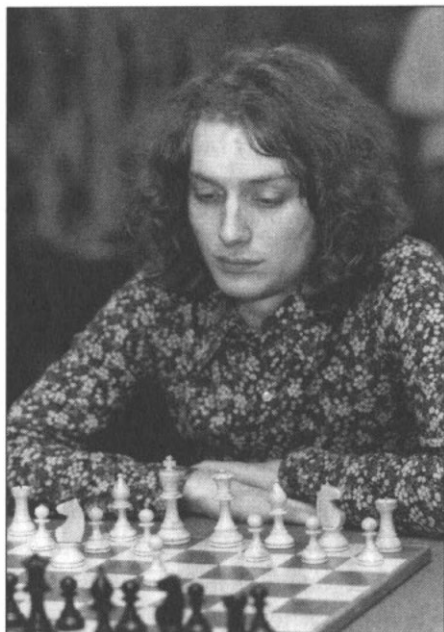
helping the girls. Smiling bashfully, they took out and displayed badges depicting Gufeld...

Edik in a restaurant was a rare spectacle. I remember one breakfast of his in a five-star hotel in Manila during the 1992 Olympiad. He appeared in the room with a polythene bag, in which he would stack provisions from the self-service counter, and take them away with him; but for the moment it contained a book of his selected games: you never know who you will bump into during a competition in which teams from nearly all the countries of the world are competing.

Edik drank six glasses of fruit juice, one after another, as a light warm-up. Then he selected two large plates and loaded them with everything that he happened to see: fruit, dried fish, mushrooms and fried eggs, boiled eggs, potato cakes, ham, cheese and numerous other culinary delights. A bowl of soup – a not uncommon breakfast dish in Asian countries – was also, of course, not forgotten. Then he would occupy a free table, not far from the counter that was covered with the various dishes, in order to fully control the field of battle, and then get down to the business of eating. ‘Tea or coffee, sir?’ asked the waiter. ‘Coffee, my friend, coffee’, replied Edik with a mouth full of food, and, hastily swallowing, he shouted as the boy moved away: ‘And tea as well!’

In 1973 a group of Soviet participants in the Interzonal tournament were preparing for this important event together with their trainers in Sochi on the Black Sea. In the evenings, some of the grandmasters, to escape from the monotonous food, would set off to one of the local restaurants. Gufeld would appear every evening in the boarding house dining room, empty several dishes so that they didn’t go to waste, and only after this bravura overture would he set off with Geller and the other famous grandmasters to one of the town restaurants.

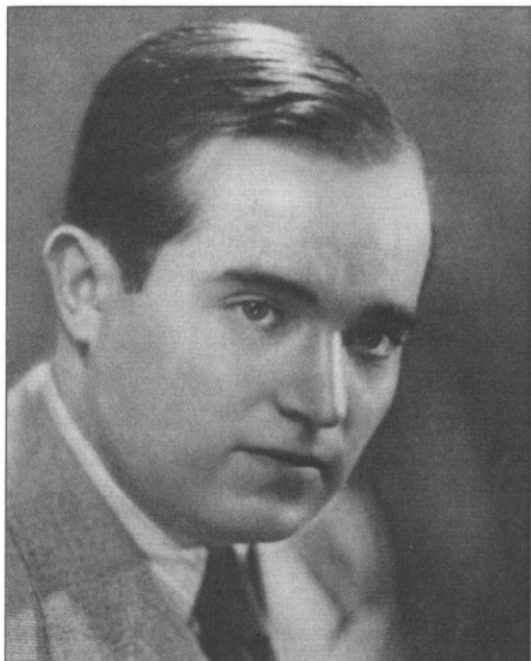
Sometimes, staggering the staff of a dining room or restaurant, Edik would order the whole menu. ‘What do you mean, everything?’ they would ask him. ‘Just bring everything that you’ve got’ – here Edik would pass his hand over the sheet from top to bottom. So that the reader should not get a false impression, I should emphasise that we are not talking about restaurants awarded stars in the Michelin guide, but about dining rooms or cafés in Soviet times, when the list of all the



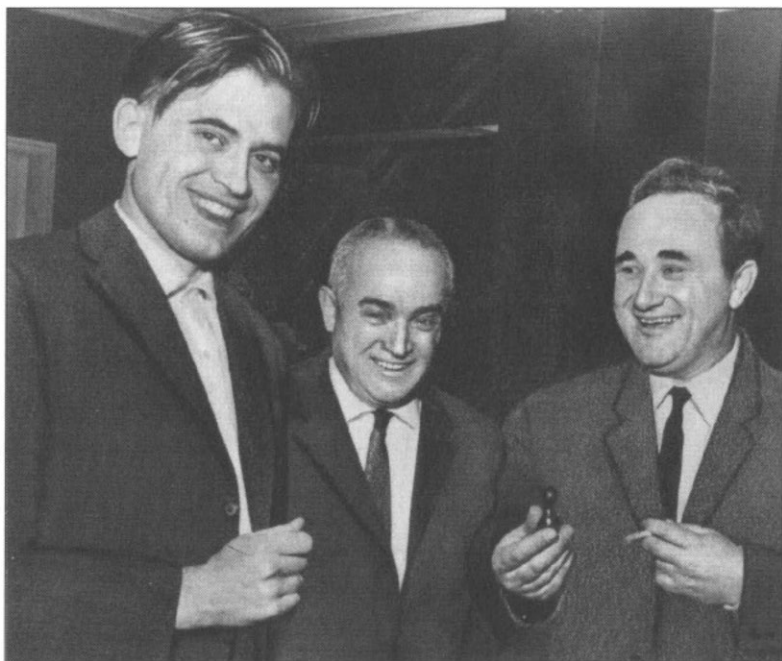
Timman during the Hoogovens Tournament
in 1974.



Jan Timman and the author on Red Square, September 1997.



Salo Flohr in the '30s.



Flohr was the arbiter in the match between Larsen and Geller in Copenhagen 1966.



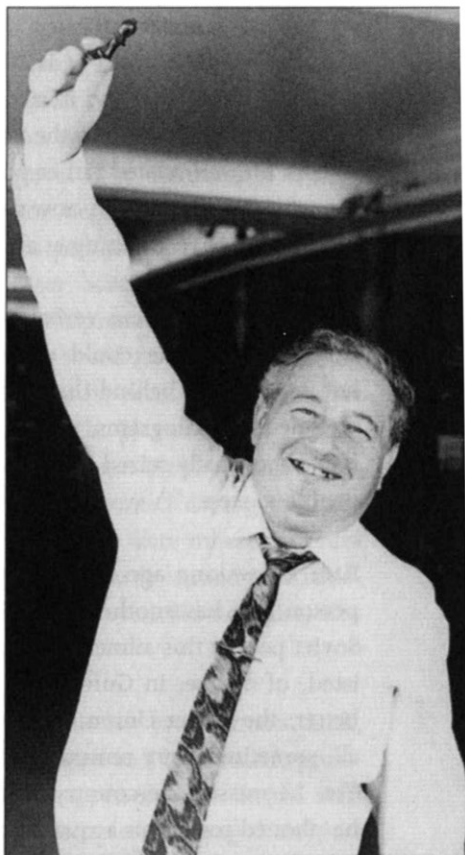
Moscow Olympiad 1956: Flohr watches a post-mortem with Najdorf, Petrosian and Tal.



Euwe-Alekhine 1935: Salo Flohr analyses with Euwe, while an interested Rudolf Spielmann (standing on his left) looks on.



Eduard Gufeld



Eduard Gufeld waving his favourite piece, the black king's bishop, which served him well in countless King's Indians and Dragons.



Young Gufeld with Vasily Smyslov, one of the World Champions he managed to beat.

dishes, including desserts, could easily be accommodated on two sheets, or perhaps even one.

‘On the same conditions as Gufeld’, replied Mark Taimanov, when he was invited to give a simultaneous display in Singapore. He knew that a few months earlier Gufeld had been there, and he decided that there was no way that Edik would have stinted himself in discussing with the organisers a fee for his appearance. ‘No, anything but that’, they replied in horror, ‘it is true that your colleague did not request any fee, only a hotel and meals, but once he ended up in the restaurant he ate there until late into the night without stopping...’

Edik himself related rather philosophically to his passion and did not even try to fight it. ‘I’m now on a diet’, he would often say. ‘For dinner I didn’t have anything at all for the first course. On the other hand I ate five second courses...’

From the enormous verbal epic, describing Gufeld’s incredible culinary exploits, one could extract numerous other stories. But, who knows, perhaps behind that enormous man, who at the end of his life weighed 130 kilograms, was concealed a thin, perpetually hungry little boy, who finally seized upon food, and, once he had begun eating, was unable to stop.

Kant knew long ago that, apart from nostalgia for his motherland, a person also has another ailment – nostalgia for foreign lands. But for Soviet people this ailment was developed in expanded form. It also existed, of course, in Gufeld. All his life he was hunting for something better: the Soviet Union, Ukraine, Georgia, numerous foreign trips to all, sometimes very remote, corners of the world, and finally America. Yet, he missed the country which he had left, and virtually every day he phoned round his acquaintances not only in other cities of America, but also in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Germany, Israel – everywhere, where his former compatriots lived. ‘Listen’, he would usually begin, and, after proposing some project or stunning idea which had occurred to him, he would always say the sad words: ‘Do you remember...’

Once, already in post-Soviet times of course, he also phoned me.

‘Listen’, Edik began straight away, ‘could you tell the editor of your magazine that I have some stunning material? The manuscript is ready, and it will be a best seller, a best seller, such as they haven’t seen be-

fore.' 'Belochka?' I asked, hinting at one of his favourite stories that had appeared in countless magazines and many of his books. 'Even better. Only for you.' Unexpectedly he sharply changed the subject: 'Incidentally, have you ever been to Tasmania? Do you think that they can offer any terms? I could read my cycle of lectures on television; they are bound to have television, and believe me, these lectures are unique...'

On arriving in America, Edik did not change his habits: everywhere that he played, the cloud of scandal invariably hung over his games, and many halls where open tournaments were played in the United States heard his excited voice. There was no end to the number of incidents in his games, and from time to time he broke into open letters, which appeared in American and Russian publications, regarding this or that grandmaster or tournament organiser, accusing them of all sorts of sins or of organising, as he thought, conspiracies against him. Initially in America he was greatly helped in word and deed by Arnold Denker. But at some tournament for veterans he accused the venerable American grandmaster of the fact that one of the players had lost deliberately to Denker, to enable him to take first place. He thought in categories, to which he himself had become accustomed during the long years of his professional career, and the traits that were inherent in him in his youth: impetuosity, a quick temper that easily turned into rudeness, boasting and bragging, and a lack of manners, did not, alas, disappear with age.

In December 2001 in Las Vegas, in one of his last tournaments, Edik, on finding himself in a critical position, resorted to a last chance, pressing the button of the safety alarm, which happened to be on the wall above the head of his opponent, who was completely enraged and lost all his orientation in time trouble.

He called what he spoke 'Gufeld-English', explaining this comical language in his usual manner: 'Better than your Russian.' Of course, he no longer made hōrns and bleated, like the occasion many years earlier when, in a restaurant with Timman, he tried to explain to the waiter the word 'mutton', but he would persistently call an isolated pawn 'a pawn which has no friend', priding himself on his invention and repeating it, like the majority of his jokes, a hundred times.

Gufeld continued playing in open tournaments to the very end, although he undoubtedly realised that his chances of success were minimal. At some point his rating dropped almost to the 2400 mark, and the deficiencies in his play, which were present even in his best years, only increased. Problems with his health and age merely aggravated the overall picture. In the last period of his life in his 'Eduard Gufeld Chess Academy' in Los Angeles, as he pompously called the two modest rooms which he rented on the ground floor of the house where he himself lived, stood an old, second-hand computer. In these rooms Edik held Sunday rapid-play tournaments, simultaneous displays, and the analysis of games. He gave some individual lessons and, of course, sold chess literature, in particular his own books. Sometimes he would travel to his pupils, or rather, he would be taken. He did not acquire a car, and did not intend to learn to drive, or rather, he did not want to. He did not find a constant assistant or partner, and within a couple of years it all gradually came to nothing...

Like the majority of people in their declining years, he was nostalgic about his youth: earlier life had been so good, if only because earlier there had been no 'earlier'. In his case the past signified not only his lost youth, but the atmosphere of those times, which had also been lost for ever. Therefore, when those players died with whom he had spent in total many years of his life at tournaments, training sessions and trips abroad – Lutikov, Polugaevsky, Geller, Gipslis, Suetin, Liberzon – a little part of himself was taken away. 'The Mona Lisa has been orphaned', he said, when two years ago its co-author Bagirov died, not suspecting that before long neither of its 'parents' would be left.

It is well-known that we are all woven out of parts, and Eduard Gufeld was no exception. In him were combined a vivid, talented chess player and a miser, a devoted trainer and a self-centred person, a wisecracker and a shameless braggart, an incisive journalist or rather narrator, and an unprincipled troublemaker, a loving son and a dishonest card player and a glutton, and a person who could be both charming and vulgar.

Plummer Park is a place of relaxation and contact for the Russian-speaking emigrés of Western Hollywood, one of the regions where there is a high proportion of former inhabitants of the Soviet Union in

downtown Los Angeles. One of the zones of this park has been selected by lovers of table games: chess, dominoes, cards, backgammon.

From La Brea Avenue, where Gufeld lived during his last years with his old mother, it was only a stone's throw to this park – about seven minutes of unhurried walking. It need hardly be said that here everyone knew Edik, and he was often there, in recent times practically every day. All sorts of people gather here, the atmosphere often gets heated, and things often end in fights. A couple of years ago Edik was severely beaten for interfering in a card game, and had it not been for the defence of an old acquaintance – a candidate master from Kharkov, who took him home all black and blue – who knows how things might have ended.

It happened on 10th September 2002. Edik felt ill during a card game – his favourite bura, it was said. Even so, he declared: 'It's nothing bad, let's continue playing...' Directly from Plummer Park they took him to the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. A severe stroke.

Sixty years earlier in 1942, in the Manhattan Chess Club in New York, José Raúl Capablanca fell ill during a card game. He died without regaining consciousness in the Mount Sinai Hospital. What analogies would Edik himself have drawn with this fact. With these names? We will never know. For the last two days he was in a coma. What did he see then, what light at the end of the tunnel? The brilliant attack in his game with Smyslov? 'Belochka' translated into Mongolian? Another tempting visit to Malaysia? His distant Kiev childhood?

He died towards evening on 23rd September 2002, when in his native Kiev it was already morning. Eduard Efimovich Gufeld lived for 66 years, 6 months and 6 days. Would he – a lover of associations – have tried to create some image out of this gyration of sixes?

He loved animals, especially birds, and he could watch them for hours. In-Daugavpils in 1978, standing on a balcony, he fed the seagulls, throwing food straight into the air. The rapacious birds screamed as they seized the plunder in flight, often grabbing pieces from one another. Was that how Edik also saw human relations, in which the main and only thing should be the element of personal gain, the constant battle for a place under the sun?

'I grew up in poverty typical of the entire Soviet Union, in terrible conditions. Life often drove me to the edge of the abyss and I was simply forced to bare my teeth, at any cost clinging onto everything that I could', Edik recalled about his childhood.

In some ways he remained like a big child – to the very end he did not correspond to his years and he did not even make efforts to convince himself that he had already long been the age of those people who seemed old to him when he himself was young. For everyone he remained Edik or Gufa, and if someone addressed him as Eduard Efimovich, this sounded more like a joke.

I think that he was essentially a very lonely man.

His father was killed in the first months of the war, and Edik grew up in an atmosphere of the boundless love of his mother, who did not remarry, devoting her entire life to her son. She idolised him, but, being a classical 'Jewish mum' she wanted to resolve for her son all his life's problems. And for her Edik always remained little Edinka, whether in the war years of evacuation to Samarkand, whether in hungry Kiev in 1946, when the fans, standing on the edge of the football pitch shouted: 'Gufa, shoot!' to a thin little boy, who was constantly arguing with the referee. Or whether in his heyday, when his name – Gufeld – was heard on the radio and was constantly on the sports pages of the national press. And in the decades that flew past so quickly, spent by him on endless trips, right up to the last announcement in the Russian language *Panorama* of 10th October 2002: 'There are no words to express the pain of losing my only son, my beloved and dear Eduard Gufeld. My heart is filled with blood. Dear son, you will always be with me. Your lone loving mother.'

'Here I was born, here I began playing chess, here there are chestnuts like nowhere else in the world, in Kiev the air is somehow special...' said Gufeld. From Lysenko Street, where Edik lived with his mother in a one-room flat, it is not far at all to Shevchenko Park. There, from time immemorial, in any weather, chess players gather to play blitz or simply the winner stays on. They are still playing now.

January 2003

Beijing 2024

The celebrations to mark FIDE's 100-year Jubilee were timed to coincide with the 2024 Olympic Games, which as you cannot have failed to notice took place in the Chinese capital of Beijing. The Opening Ceremony of the Olympiad included the sacrificing of one hundred selected lambs, which was carried out directly in the stadium, as a token to the future flourishing of the international chess organisation. This ritual did not come as a surprise: back in 2004 FIDE approved a special resolution, in accordance with which before the start of every tournament the organisers have to sacrifice a lamb, thus guaranteeing the successful staging of the event. Representatives of the federations of West European countries, accusing one another of supplying poor-quality meat, could not in fact come to an agreement, and so New Zealand had received from FIDE the exclusive right to supply the animals to countries of the Old World.

It is true that, at the FIDE Congress in 2008 in Tashkent, a proposal was considered from the representatives of Antarctica about the possibility of using penguins for the same purpose, with reference to the fact that for the moment this was the only animal inhabiting the South Polar region. Their proposal was unanimously turned down by the congress delegates. 'The lamb was and remains our symbol', they bleated in concert.

On the other hand, the same Congress noted with satisfaction the obviously increasing interest in chess in Antarctica. Thanks to the warming of the climate the colonisation of the sixth continent is taking on serious forms, and the first open chess championship has already been held there, although for the moment the first places have gone to visitors. The prizewinners of the tournament were Andrey Buturin (Wales), Isidor Shapiro (Tasmania) and Tigran Mokasian (Germany).

For decades already most of the chess action is concentrated on Highway 64, the chess branch of the Ultranet which in its original form, the Internet, revolutionised interhuman traffic at the end of the twentieth century. However, contrary to earlier expectations the old in

situ chess has by no means disappeared. In Europe still maintaining its position is the prestigious tournament of Van Wonderom, which last winter took place in St Moritz. The strongest grandmasters, wearing nothing at all, at the sound of a gong signalled by the tournament arbiter Gert Glyabert (this was his 38th tournament in a row) plunged into barrels of ice-cold water from where they yelled their moves at each other.

In one of the parks of the famous Swiss resort one could often meet two honoured guests of the tournament, strolling unhurriedly along its pathways. They touchingly supported each other by the arm, stopping from time to time to pause for breath. One, with his uncovered silvery head of hair and black bushy eyebrows, was vigorously gesticulating and talking, while the other, shorter in stature and with a prominent paunch, was leaning on his stick and nodding in agreement. The champions from the distant past, Jerry Gazzarov and Barmatoly Karpenti – it was of course them – were recalling with pleasure the days gone by. In the Spring of 2020 in Hawaii the marriage of Gazzarov's son and Karpenti's daughter took place, an event that was watched on the Ultranet by the entire chess world. The honoured guest at the wedding was the ageing Championmanias, who was carried in on a special stretcher by members of the FIDE Executive Committee. He extended his hand to Gazzarov and Karpenti, and they embraced in front of the entire chess world; the 1800 invited guests, with tears in their eyes, stood and applauded the former implacable enemies.

Also the open tournament in Groningen remains very popular. True, the overall prize fund has diminished a tad. It now comprises 1254 dollars, but it still attracts a large number of participants. The accommodation has also deteriorated somewhat – at the latest edition a grandmaster was only offered a bunk in a six-bed hotel room – but for the majority this in no way deterred them from participating in their favourite tournament. 'The more the merrier', commented a representative of the traditionally large Israeli delegation, lying on his bed and taking out of the bedside table a jar of raspberry jam, far-sightedly brought from home. Initially not all were happy with

another innovation: to visit the toilet, a payment had now to be made – ten cents. At first the players complained about the mounting expenditure, but gradually they also adapted to this. ‘Scientists have come to the conclusion that to preserve the organs from ageing one should drink as little as possible. That’s the case, so that is what has to be done.’ ‘Drink less tea – go more rarely for a pee!’ was the slogan, hanging everywhere in the Martini tournament hall, and repeated with some embarrassment by one of the oldest participants of the Groningen tournament. She had played here for the first time in 1989, and now she had come to the tournament together with her granddaughter. After unpacking her bags, the first thing the veteran did was to place on her bedside table a photograph of those unforgettable years: the director of the tournament, the legendary Zurokol, stands surrounded by the female participants in the tournament; she herself is the girl with long plaits...

At the FIDE Congress in Dar es Salaam in 2002 the question of changing the organisation’s motto was raised. The proposal – ‘A friend in FIDE is a friend indeed’ – put forward by the Colombian delegate, in order to rebuke those of little faith, focusing attention on the ever increasing problems of the organisation, was greeted approvingly. ‘This will be a worthy reply to those who are spreading rumours in the congress lobbies about the inevitable self-destruction of FIDE’, added the Greek representative. Even so, an overwhelming majority of delegates decided not to break with tradition by retaining the old motto, although with a slight correction more according with the spirit of the times. Now instead of ‘Gens Una Sumus’ on the FIDE emblem was engraved ‘Gens Una Cumus’, from the name of the miraculous drink from the Kazakh steppes (mare’s milk), the rejuvenating effect of which on the organism had been demonstrated by experts. This correction, incidentally, could not have been more appropriate, since checks by the anti-doping commission of the Olympic Committee had become more frequent. Thus after one of the rounds of a tournament in Sarajevo, grandmasters Pimman and Kozolov were found to have in their blood three times the caffeine limit, and eleven times the alcohol limit. The friends blamed their physical state on the fact that the previous evening they had followed a live game on the Ultranet between

Jerry Gazzarov and Paulus Schmidler, a clash that had ended in a brilliant victory for the latter. Needless to say, their defence was rejected and both grandmasters were given a final warning.

In connection with this the entire history of the ancient game was revised. Trainers were requested not to focus the attention of the young on the games of Alekhine and Tal, who, as is known, were also partial to a drop.

Incidentally, on studying the games of the previous World Champions, trainers now allot not more than half an hour per champion. At the moment of writing they number 37. Each year the name of a new grandmaster is added to the list, a tradition that was only interrupted in the years 2001 and 2016.

In 2001 the championship was not held at all, since a special commission was examining the financial affairs of FIDE. After several months' work the commission (chaired by a representative from Nigeria, with delegates from Indonesia, Cameroon and Uzbekistan) did not find, of course, anything violating the accepted way of paying prizes, but precious time for preparing the championship had been lost. The result of the commission's work was that Dora Barst, the BBC journalist on whose initiative, incidentally, the investigation had been held, was barred for a year from engaging in journalism. She was even forced to leave Britain and settle in Georgia.

The proposal by Taras Artyomov that henceforth FIDE should receive 74% of all prizes from tournaments staged by this organisation was greeted enthusiastically. Professional players were especially happy. 'Now we are not dependent on sponsors – we ourselves are the sponsors', they said.

In 2016 the World Championship was won for the second time by Alexander Vizirman. This result was a surprise in particular to the grandmaster himself: he had long since given up playing, fully switching to work on the Ultranet. 'I am perfectly satisfied', he said, 'and in particular because it has completely shamed those rude wisecrackers, who after my first memorable success called me a king for a day.' By winning his second championship, Alexander also received another present on his fiftieth birthday – he was paid in full his prize with interest and with interest on the interest from his first championship –

the system of Taras Artyomov had begun to operate! 'The spectre of a needy old age has finally been dispelled', the two-times World Champion sighed with relief.

Unfortunately, another FIDE initiative approved at the same congress, did not last long. This was: in a family where both partners were chess players, newly-born children given the name of Nasrik, automatically had a sum of one hundred US dollars transferred to their account. An essential condition, however, was the combined rating of the couple should be at least five thousand. In 2008, after Burma alone sent in 967 applications, FIDE was reluctantly forced to abandon this practice.

In order to introduce greater dynamism into the play, in 2016 FIDE took the decision to combine castling with the simultaneous development of the king's rook at e1 and e8 respectively. It need hardly be said that the number of games won by White increased dramatically. A heavy blow was struck in particular against those who liked defending the Ruy Lopez: the consequences that the innovation had for the Open Variation are obvious, but also in the main lines after 5.0-0 + 6.♖e1 the move 5...♗e7? simply lost a pawn without any tangible compensation. The deferred variation of the Steinitz Defence still somehow stayed afloat, although in a clearly inferior version. In a word, White triumphed, although in his camp here and there discontented voices were heard. It was mainly lovers of the King's Gambit who grumbled. 'The majority of the variations have become simply pointless', declared grandmaster Khodorov, in whose repertoire this opening occupied a pride of place. One of the first to welcome the innovation was grandmaster Efim Dumkeld. 'I frequently and successfully employed this idea back in the time when I was a soldier in the Ukraine', he said, 'although, to be fair, it has to be admitted that this mostly occurred in blitz games...' The FIDE Congress acknowledged the American player's rights to be indisputable, and unanimously called the innovation 'The Dumkeld Correction.' News of this reached the ageing grandmaster in a San Francisco night club, where he was celebrating his eightieth birthday watching a striptease show. After shedding a few tears, he immediately made this impromptu comment: 'Better than any stripteaser is a statuette of the Mona Lisa. Castle my way – bring the king's rook into play!'

Grandmaster Evdokim Kalashnikov added his voice. 'I have always said that the best reply to 1.e4 is 1...c5', he declared, despite the fact that in the Sicilian Defence his favourite variation was in deep crisis: a variation found by the program Heinz was displaying an ending, arising by force after the 38th move, where Black's position looked highly unpleasant. 'I don't understand what this means', Kalashnikov quite reasonably declared, 'let it show me a forced win, otherwise I am ready to defend this position against anyone.' Indeed, !? and ?! signs have completely disappeared from the pages of chess books and magazines, just as in its time the check sign disappeared – the time for doubts in chess was left behind in the last century.

Gradually, however, books themselves have also disappeared. 'The best book is a data base', chess players now say. The information, contained in the books, would be obsolete even before they were published anyway. The last one came out in 2009. This was a book by Jerry Gazarov, consisting entirely of analyses of only one move, which had occurred in a game from a simultaneous display that he had given on the Ultranet against the Armenian national team. A splendid edition, with a large number of diagrams, and with analyses extending in some cases to move 113. The book was accompanied by a CD-ROM, with sound effects at the crucial moments.

One by one, chess magazines too have gone out of existence. The first to go was *Outside Chess*, thereby confirming its name. The one that held out longest was *New In Chess*, although in 2014 it inevitably changed to *Old In Chess* with the motto: 'The new is the old that has been thoroughly forgotten!' Subscribers to the magazine are largely veterans, tempered in the battles of open tournaments in the 90s of the previous century, who are still playing with the old castling rule. The German Richard Gübner and the Englishman John Rann, both respected grandmasters, have already tried to publish a book with a branched network of variations, endeavouring to reach the absolute truth, but without success. 'Anyone can now reach the truth, with the help of the powerful program Heinz, using one finger' – this is the general opinion. 'And broadly speaking, what is the truth?' many repeat the question of two-thousand-year antiquity, to which a satisfactory answer has not yet been given. Danish representatives even put it on the agenda during the FIDE Congress in 2020, but, of course, it

only provoked jokes. *In vino veritas*, correctly reasoned the delegates, especially as the Olympic Committee had finally recommended, in that same year, the unrestricted use of drugs in any type of sport. 'The march of human progress cannot be restrained by artificial means', was recorded in its decision.

In 2009 the Fischer clock was finally abolished. All FIDE events were henceforth conducted with the so-called 'No Mercy' clock. The essence of it is that after each move a player automatically loses ten seconds. 'The former dithering is finally a thing of the past', the professionals greeted the innovation with enthusiasm. Indeed the benefits of the novelty are evident: primarily, there is no longer any need to study the endgame. Playing protracted games has become in itself a dangerous occupation. The time disappearing with each move could lead to a loss even by the stronger side in the event of indecisive action or standing still. Experts on the past remembered the brilliant Tal, who said in his time that endings in his games could be reached with him a piece up in the event of a successfully conducted attack, or a piece down if the attack did not succeed. In both cases the concluding part of the game does not demand any special knowledge and cannot last long, he is supposed to have asserted. 'It is this that the public wants – beautiful combinations and brilliant attacks', supporters of the game as a spectacle confirmed this opinion. 'Only in this way chess can become suitable for television and compete successfully with tennis and football.'

Even philosophers such as the famous Bergson came to the defence of the new trend, referring to the analogy with life itself, when minutes and seconds escape from us from the future to the past and depart from us forever. 'Everything is predetermined, the future is dissolved in the timeless present, which has not the slightest prospect, and therefore the addition of time in chess creates unnecessary illusions and prolongs the inevitable end, consisting in mate', he said.

Around that time the old-fashioned habit to press the chess clock, incidentally, also completely disappeared: after a move made on the electronic board, the opponent's clock was automatically started. This was not only the wind of progress, but also to some extent an enforced measure, enabling players to avoid additional painful sensations in their

index finger. The point was that players, regularly participating in competitions and obliged to spend several hours a day in front of a computer screen, examining the games from the latest tournaments or playing endless games on the Ultranet and constantly pressing the 'enter' key, began to suffer from a professional illness, called 'enter-finger'. This illness had become so widespread, that in chemists' shops they sold special protections for chess players, which were in fact called 'enter-fingers'. Of various colours and sizes, many were supplied with a text, and along with unpretentious ones such as 'The best there is...' or 'Only our enter-finger guarantees the complete safety of the searching process', one also comes across poetic ones, for example: 'Make your losses rarer – be an enter-finger wearer!' For recommending their suppliers, grandmasters are provided with free enter-fingers.

Pretty young female chess players, smiling playfully, advertised these protections on television, and it was whispered by their less fortunate colleagues that for an enter-finger advert the former earned more than for winning a major international tournament.

However, as a logical evolution, the majority of tournaments over the past years have been held on the Ultranet. There was no longer any need to travel to other countries, and the champion of Scandinavia stated that in his whole life not only had he never travelled outside of Iceland, but not once had he even left the attic of his house in his native Nyardvik. Even Kuk fan Delly, who earlier could be found at home not more than ten to twelve days in a year, throughout 2009 only once left Rurmond, and that was in order to visit neighbouring Dortmund to sell his BMW, which had now become completely unnecessary. Many now, without leaving their apartments, contrived to play up to a hundred games in an evening, in so doing visiting all six continents, and grandmaster Trustemov reckoned that during one period of four hours he visited 36 countries in the world. 'Regular chess tourists of the Ultranet' was how they were condemned by representatives of old-fashioned over-the-board chess.

Play in professional tournaments on the Ultranet with significant prizes gave birth to a new profession – controllers so that participants could not use the advice of a computer during a game or look at their own analyses. There is no need to say that the people invited to per-

form this duty had a reputation for experience and absolute honesty.

Nevertheless the increasing flood of complaints and protests forced the sponsors and organisers of tournaments to introduce another position – controller of controllers. But even this did not bring the desired peace. They were already thinking of introducing the position of Controlling Controller of Controllers – CCC – when a radical solution to the problem appeared of its own accord: in the room where a participant sat in front of the screen, in the corridor and in the toilet, everywhere cameras were installed, recording every movement of a player, which was watched by arbiters, who were part of the organising committee of the tournament. At first the participants were embarrassed by the innovation, but then they became so accustomed to it, that many of them decided not to remove the cameras at all from the walls of their abodes, and they even went so far as to have additional cameras installed at their own request in the bedroom and living room as well. ‘We are honest people, and we have nothing to be ashamed of’, they said with dignity.

‘The little Big Brothers’, as the chess players affectionately called them, ‘have helped us not only to introduce discipline into our training, but have also significantly improved relations in the family.’ Here too some envious people asserted that those living under the indefatigable eye were guided not only by altruistic considerations, but these were no more than rumours until Grandmaster N, a participant in the women’s Candidates’ tournament, published a sensational open letter on the Ultranet. ‘I do indeed receive regular payment for this. If you knew the state of affairs in women’s chess, you would not condemn me’, wrote the girl.

The presence of cameras helped, in the end, to expose grandmaster Madfeld, who won numerous prizes in tournaments on the Ultranet in the period from 2008-2010. Concealed under this name were Madams and Belfeld – participants in the notorious super-tournaments in the 90s of the previous century. After losing their practical strength, they decided to appear in competitions on the Ultranet under one name. Both were ordered to return the prizes won in this dubious manner, but they declined, referring to the fact that they supposedly had not been paid significant sums in tournaments played a decade earlier, and the matter was passed for consideration by the Olympic Committee in

Lausanne. The Committee, however, had more than enough on its plate – still dragging on was the Karpenti affair, which had begun in the previous century.

A big stir in the chess world was provoked by a press conference by Bobby Krishner early in 2013. The legendary American, who had just celebrated his seventieth birthday, and had been living continuously for the past twenty years in Prague, announced his decision: he was moving to Israel. On arriving there, he became an active member of a religious kibbutz not far from the Lebanese border. 'I have always dreamed of this', he said. 'In the end I never made a secret of the fact that my mother was a Jew. And I am getting on... Live among the Gentiles, die among the Jews', he added with a sigh. The children from the kibbutz, to whom he sometimes gave chess lessons, called him 'Uncle Borukh', and, perching on his knee, they would play with his long side-locks. Ze joffi, he would say in Hebrew, expressing his contentment. Thus was Bobby even imprinted on a photograph: Uncle Borukh always found time for a kind word both for photographers, and for journalists.

Over the past years the centre of chess life gradually shifted to China. Beijing, like a new Mecca, began to attract both those who hoped to earn from chess a hundred-odd yuan, and those who through age could not do anything else. Names had to be changed, it is true, pronouncing them in the Chinese manner. In the corridors of the enormous Palace of Chess in Beijing loitered the crazed and hard-of-hearing former Dutch grandmaster Ko-Ko-Nko, badgering everyone with his accounts of times long since passed. The old man made on that he knew first Morphy's grandson, then Lasker's niece, but he was brushed aside like an annoying fly.

The former American grandmaster Ki-po-linsky found himself in Beijing, having moved his permanent place of residence there many years earlier. He was so fluent in the language that the local inhabitants took him for a Chinese, especially since in old age his facial features had taken on an appropriate form. Evil tongues asserted, however, that this was the result of plastic surgery, carried out in an expensive Manhattan clinic just before he moved from America, but this, of course, was simply slander. He was even permitted to have his own site

on the Ultranet, where each month he proclaimed the best player in the world for the period passed. By a strange coincidence, every time it was the President of the Beijing Chess Federation, in the home of whom Ki-po, as his friends called him, worked during the day as a lift operator. Sometimes, after a glass or two, he would begin phoning America, to find out the result of the latest baseball match. At the time of the full moon Ki-po, would become sentimental, his eyes would frequently fill with tears, and he would repeat with a sob: 'Veniamin Semyonovich, my first trainer, was right at the time, he was right: I should have taken up a real profession...'

One who felt fine in Beijing was Edmundo Greene, who had become deputy Director of the Palace of Chess for foreign connections. His life in London had become intolerable when in the summer of 2012 the well-known chess historian Kren Brylde disclosed the secret of Edward Summer, who for decades had been tearing Greene to pieces in his numerous publications. He turned out to be Edmundo Greene himself, who had realised back in his days as a student the correctness of the old truth that your name should always be in the news, in whatever light it appears. Greene admitted that he had been misleading the honourable public for more than thirty years. The scandal blew up to such an extent that Greene was obliged not only to leave the prestigious Sun newspaper, where he had worked nearly all his life, but even to emigrate from the country. Greene also confirmed that it was he who had been that sixth agent, recruited by the KGB in Britain during his student days in Cambridge. This fact became perfectly obvious in 2011, following the publications of secret documents by the former KGB's chief archivist Pindrokhin, who had defected to the West, and who, incidentally, was himself a strong amateur player, regularly taking part in Ultranet tournaments under the name Luzhin.

Ki-po and Greene were usually to be found in the Beijing Central Chess Club in the Donner Room, where in the place of honour hung a demonstration board, inlaid with sapphires and jaspers, and depicting the final position from the game Liu Wenzhe-Donner, from the 1978 Buenos Aires Olympiad, which the Chinese player ended with spectacular fireworks including a queen sacrifice. 'I will now be known

throughout China', the Dutch grandmaster remarked prophetically at the time. 'I will become the Chinese Kieseritzky.'

News of Greene's unmasking was greeted with enthusiasm by the former World Championship candidate, the evergreen Portnoy: 'To me personally this was all clear back at the time of my match with Karpenti', declared the veteran. With the help of a medium Portnoy had just drawn a match with the late Akiba Rubinstein. The very fact of such matches against invisible and unknown opponents no longer surprised anyone. 'Tens of thousands such matches are played every day on Highway 64', commented from California the guru of the Ultratet, grandmaster Findzhi. 'Yesterday, for example, when the score of my blitz match became 12-12, I finally realised that I was playing myself.' However, the time was not completely wasted: 'Still my rating somehow increased by 7 points', he added.

The FIDE Congress in this Jubilee year of 2024 gave the names of the new grandmasters, a total of 312 players. Following the example of the First Friday tournaments, which have been held for a long time in Sofia, now very popular are the Every Sunday tournaments, beginning every week in Bucharest. When it transpired that a representative from Cambodia, who is living there permanently, was playing simultaneously in three such tournaments and in two of them was close to achieving the grandmaster norm, the Norwegian Federation tried to put an end to this practice, but it was not supported by the congress delegates. On the other hand, to combat the inflation of the grandmaster title, a special commission was set up. And, as it transpired, not in vain. On the first check, one of the candidates, trying to mate a lone king with a rook, twice ran into stalemate.

Among the new holders of the supreme title, special mention should be made of the American Gosh Kraitskin, who last year finally achieved his third and final grandmaster norm at the age of 49 – an unusual occurrence. He was immediately contracted to make a film of this amazing event. A few minutes after the joyful announcement, Gosh's constant mentor Artur Sagetsky phoned him from Moscow. 'I always believed in this. Slow but sure. Get to the root', he said. 'Now our immediate aim is to get your rating up to the 2750 mark. Of course, with such a figure you are still a long way from the top hundred, but even so we will aim

for it... Only a fool finishes at the start, a wise man begins from the end', he concluded.

By contrast, the youngest grandmaster in the entire history of this title became Fan-Zin-Su at the age of eight years, eleven months and three days. This was no surprise: the child's happy parents told journalists that already at the age of four months, Fan's gaze was constantly directed at the computer screen.

An honoured guest of the Beijing Olympiad was Flashy Anon. The legendary Indian has long ceased taking part in tournaments. It all began with his game with Alexander Morodkevich in 2017, when Flashy thought over his first move for 45 minutes. In reply to the question by journalists, what had he been thinking about for so long, Flashy smiled: 'I was simply interested in knowing what Bronstein thought about for 40 minutes while pondering his first move.' Initially this seemed like a little joke, but in fact it all turned out to be very serious – from this moment on Flashy began to suffer from terrible time trouble, he became unsociable, the smile disappeared from his face, in addition he was quite unable to adapt to the new minus-ten-second rule, and in the end he was forced to give up playing. Flashy's decision was in no way influenced by the report that appeared on the Ultranet, that one of the firms producing enter-fingers had expressed the desire to sponsor his postponed match with Gazzarov.

The Olympiad was a success. the Americans took the lead from the first round, and all the time increased their lead over the young Chinese team in second place. In the tenth round the Olympiad hosts managed to close right up on the leaders, when they won 4-0 against their second team (China, as the country organising the Olympiad, was by tradition allowed to field two teams). The Americans promptly issued a protest, pointing to the inadmissible, in their opinion, course taken by the games on boards three and four. However, an impartial analysis by the powerful computer Senior demonstrated a win in all variations in the final position of the third board game not later than the 84th move. Things were more complicated in the fourth board game, where the computer determined Black's advantage in the final position to be only 1/16 pawn. However, here too the arbiters decided that Black's advan-

tage could be realised, and the Americans' protest was turned down.

Everything was decided in the last round, when in the match with their direct rivals, the Chinese, who were a point behind, snatched victory by 3-1, leaving the Americans in second place. True, the latter immediately protested again, referring to the fact that, in their desire for victory, the home team had gone too far. In the opinion of the Americans, their opponents, being narrow specialists on the opening, the middlegame or the endgame, during the play had simply changed places, as one phase of the game passed into another. It need hardly be said that this protest, which was in extremely bad taste, was unanimously turned down by the Congress delegates.

As expected, in the tournament on first board victory went to the World Champion Ye Ye with the splendid result of 8 out of 9. Immediately after the team tournament, an individual tournament was held, played using the increasingly popular system of grandmaster Ktachieff – 45 seconds for the entire game. Here too there was no sensation – the result of the tournament reflected the real balance of strength in the chess world. In the first ten were seven representatives of the country that organised the Olympiad, two Americans and the Dutchman Tiviaaksen, a descendent of Russian emigrés who had settled in Groningen at the end of the previous century. It would not be out of place to mention that the average age of the players who finished in the first ten was eighteen years, four months and six days. In the individual tournament, too, the World Champion triumphed, repeating his result – 8 out of 9. 'I simply could not do any differently', said the 24-year-old Ye Ye. 'Eight is considered a lucky number in China, and here I was also helped by playing on home ground. Of course, I am very tired, and the years are taking their toll, the advance of the young is felt, but I will not concede my title without a struggle.'

The closing ceremony of the Olympiad was at its height, when Ye Ye managed to slip away unnoticed from the stadium. Fireworks and searchlights were illuminating the night sky of Beijing, when, skirting Tianmen Square, he delved into the narrow lanes of the old city. Ye Ye knew this route very well: the Jewel Market and the Fresh Fish Street were left behind, when he found himself in Liulichang with its antiquarian shops and little kiosks, full of old books, coins of the

Ming Dynasty, porcelain and drawings on papyrus. Passing even further and turning round a corner, Ye Ye approached a house standing somewhat to the side, and quickly ran up the shaky staircase to the top floor. The door to the attic was ajar, and he cautiously glanced inside. In the dimly-lit room on a mat lay an old man, dressed in a faded blue tracksuit. He did not hear Ye Ye arrive; squinting short-sightedly, he was reading a magazine, holding it very close to his watery eyes. It was No Hao, Ye Ye's first trainer, who had played in European tournaments back in the seventies of the last century. Several years earlier he had retired, and he had been allowed to take with him all the magazines gathering dust in the Chess Palace's archives – no one had used them for a long time. Now he lay for days on end, reading them through, in order within three weeks to begin all over again. Ye Ye saw that it was an issue of *New In Chess Magazine*, which No Hao read particularly often. The old man smiled. Ye Ye noticed that in his hand was the last issue of the magazine for 1999 – the last issue of the departing year, the last issue of the departing century...

December 1999

Apart from 'The Professor' (first published in Dutch under the title *Max Euwe 1901-1981* and 'A Born Optimist' (first published in the Russian chess magazine 64 in 2001) all articles in this book were originally published in New In Chess Magazine.

The Reliable Past is the eagerly awaited sequel to *Russian Silhouettes*, Genna Sosonko's marvellous collection of portraits from the golden age of Soviet chess. Sosonko, who left Leningrad to settle in Holland in 1972, described champions and other key figures of Soviet chess from a privileged dual perspective. In this new book, the author again shows himself a perceptive chronicler of a time when chess occupied a unique position in his native country; but he also wanders across its borders with his memories of Dutch World Champion Max Euwe and a touching tribute to the first ever British grandmaster, Tony Miles.

From the preface by Garry Kasparov:

The Reliable Past presents the reader with a gallery of wonderful pen-portraits that radiate the author's love of and devotion to chess, yet are tempered by a due measure of objectivity and detachment. Look, it says – this is the chess world and its heroes, warts and all! Genna Sosonko has managed to become a genuinely free person and to rise above the conventionalities of the chess world. It is essential that he has such a wide-ranging knowledge of this world and is himself an inalienable part of it, but it is his position as an independent observer, with a keen eye for both the good and the bad, that makes his stories so rich and fascinating. His portraits are not journalism but literature. • I hope that the author will continue for as long as possible to do what he does better than anyone else in the world...

Praise for *Russian Silhouettes*:

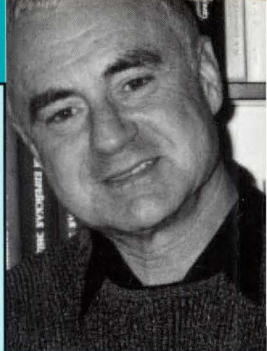
'A delightful work' – Lubosh Kavalek, THE WASHINGTON POST

'This book deserves to be read by all who value the achievements of the individual in our game, and who wish, like its author, to save the names and personalities of those individuals from oblivion.'

– John S. Hilbert, CHESSCAFE

'Since secrecy was paramount in the USSR, much of what Sosonko writes about this lost world is unfamiliar, both in the West and in Russia.' – Ian Rogers, SUN HERALD

'Beautifully written' – Hans Ree, NRC HANDELSBLAD



NEW in CHESS

